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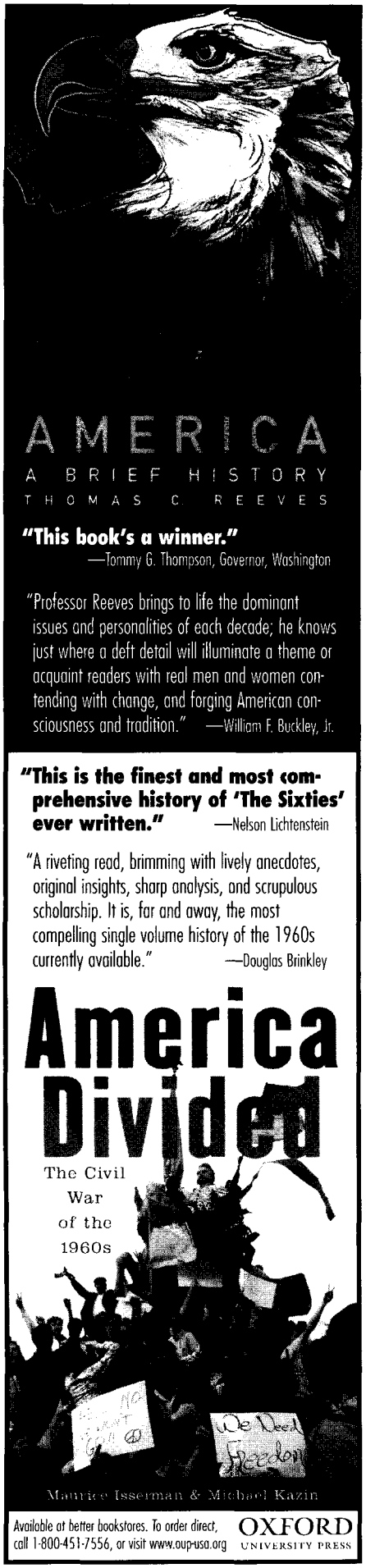
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Muck and mire

To the editors:

The New Republic attempted to chronicle the 30-year journey of two controversial socialists—Fred Newman and Lenora Fulani—through the muck and mire of the American left to the new and tendentious environs of the populist Reform Party ("The Infiltrators," December 13). Unfortunately, David Grann's account is so peppered with silly and adolescent notions that the story ends up grossly distorted.

Grann's account of Newman's early days on the left is what you'd expect from a TV miniseries on Patty Hearst, not from a politically sophisticated journal of commentary. Newman, the master of mind-control techniques, holes up in a communal apartment. Guns are stockpiled. A 20-person roving security squad is "prepared to use them." Followers meet in restaurants to evade the FBI. If it weren't so dangerous to paint this kind of picture, it would be laughable. Grann is so intent on invoking this imagery ("a group the FBI once considered armed and dangerous") that he neglects to report that the FBI promptly closed its investigation—which had been sparked by, in the agency's own words, "a source of unknown reliability"—because it could not substantiate the source's allegations. Also conveniently omitted is the fact that the FBI's harassment of the New Alliance Party (NAP) was forcefully denounced as "troubling" and "unjustified" by the chairman of the subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights, Representative Don Edwards, in a 1993 letter to then-FBI Director William Sessions.

Grann misses the point of what Newman was, and is, actually doing. Newman was a critic of the ultra-left. He provoked members of the left by exposing them as cheerleaders for the Democratic Party. Those on the left didn't like that—or his claims that some of them were doing the dirty work for the FBI and the CIA. That's why the left inaugurated the "cult" charge against him. It was a sectarian polemic by acolytes of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) that was picked up later by Democratic Party-funded "researchers" and liberal anti-populist journalists, and it has become a kind of "gospel according to St. Lexis-Nexis."

Unlike the left, which never tires of talking to itself, Newman carved out an independent mass-organizing approach that broke him and his associates out of the left's prison of "political correctness." His hope was to provide the American people with new political tools—i.e.,

The Doctor as Saint SHERWIN NULAND
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Albright vs. Holbrooke
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TONY JUDT
The Infiltrators
Fred Newman and Lenora Fulani once led an alleged cult. Now they're power brokers in the race for president.
BY DAVID GRANN

independent tools that enable them to coalesce across ideological lines to challenge the agendas of corporate and big-labor special interests.

It was this strategy that led Newman, later joined by Fulani, to involve himself in independent electoral politics and specifically to build the NAP, on whose ticket Fulani ran for the presidency twice. Grann's account of the NAP, which succeeded in getting Fulani on the ballot in all 50 states—making her the first African American and first woman in U.S. history with this distinction—is likewise preposterous. According to Grann, the NAP was consumed with "infiltrating and taking over unsuspecting organizations." Far from infiltrating left groups, Fulani was beating them hands down on the ground. In 1985, she ran for mayor of New York City on the NAP line and overwhelmed the CPUSA's mayoral contender, Jarvis Tyner, more than two to one citywide. In Harlem she outpolled him eight to one. Her 220,000 votes in the 1988 presidential run dwarfed her six left-independent competitors, whose combined national total was 87,000.

Grann concludes that Newman and Fulani are "power brokers in the race for president" as a function of deception and infiltration rather than successful organizing. He uses the Independence Party of New York (the Reform Party's affiliate) as a case in point. Wrong again. The IP became a legally recognized ballot-status party in 1994, when Tom Golisano polled 210,553 votes (50,000 were required) in the race for governor. Golisano met with Newman and Fulani to seek their support in that campaign. When a highly technical legal maneuver was required, Fulani's lawyers secured the ballot spot for

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Golisano. Fulani has brought approximately 15,000 African Americans into the IP—about ten percent of its statewide registration—and she is part of a pro-reform coalition in the party that controls 70 percent of the vote on the state committee. IP Chairman Jack Essenberg bemoans the "Marxist takeover." But there is no such thing. Fulani and the pro-reform IP coalition of which she is a part are simply more popular in the party than Essenberg is.

Ultimately, Grann's complaint is that Newman and Fulani, and their brand of independent populism, are getting a "megaphone." And they are—notwithstanding the efforts to demonize them. The real "infiltrator" story is the one about the special interests who have infiltrated our political process and taken control of America. Those are the infiltrators TNR should be targeting.

JACQUELINE SALIT
Political Director, Committee for a Unified Independent Party
New York, New York

DAVID GRANN REPLIES:
My story mentions that the FBI once considered the New Alliance Party armed and dangerous, but none of the story's allegations—including that Newman's inner circle stockpiled guns, employed a roving security band, supported regimes like Muammar Qaddafi's, infiltrated other political parties, and misused campaign funds—are based on the FBI report. In fact, those allegations come from several longtime NAP members. Most of them, including Judith Miller, the well-known author of children's books, and Dennis Serrette, the party's former presidential candidate, spoke on the record. It is they, not the FBI, who call NAP a cult. Moreover, many of the most damning allegations in the story are based on court records and campaign finance documents. And the most recent allegation—that Newman and Fulani are involved in a hostile takeover of the Reform Party—comes from people inside the Reform Party, including state party chairmen, who have watched the process firsthand for the past five years. Golisano himself, whom Jacqueline Salit cites as "a case in point" in her defense, publicly complained that Fulani was infiltrating his organization.

Cradle of the West

TO THE EDITORS:
Takis Michas's sweeping assertion that Greece "is not part of the West" may be an intriguing subject for academic discussion, but it has little to do with the facts ("Modern Orthodox," December 13).

Contrary to Michas's article, the demonstrations in Athens during President Clinton's visit were the action of a numerically insignificant militant minority, consisting of extreme left-wingers and anarchists, that nevertheless was given the right to protest, a right that defines all Western democracies. While some Greeks stuck in the past may display a nationalistic streak, the attitudes of the mainstream make Greece a European country in the Balkans and not a Balkan country in Europe—"the powerhouse of southeastern Europe ... a model for the young democracies of the Balkans," as Clinton repeatedly stressed in Athens.

The majority of the Greek people decided long ago that their minds, as well as their hearts, belong to the West. It is hard to argue that a country solidly

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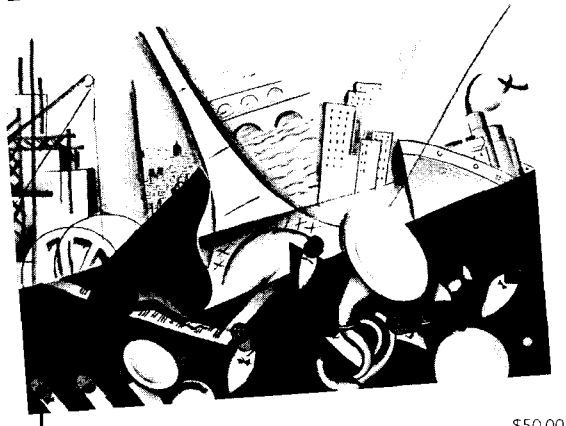
American Aesthetics



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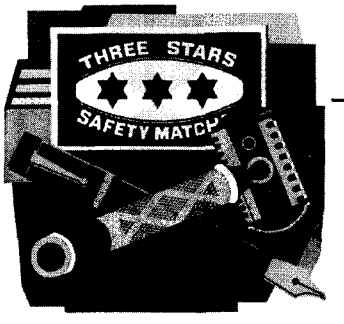

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FROM WASHINGTON

Envy

IF YOU WIN big, you lose. Ten years after the Soviet surrender in the cold war, the United States bestrides the globe as the "last remaining superpower." But the lesser powers like it less and less.

China and Russia celebrate their "strategic partnership" against you-know-whom. France denounces the United States as a "*Hyperpuissance*," with President Jacques Chirac muttering that "no nation has a right to impose its writ on the entire world." Just last month, the European Union vowed to field an intervention force that could operate separately from the United States. China is the most conspicuous "anti-hegemonist." Unlike the Europeans, whose defense budgets keep melting, Beijing is steadily modernizing its army and its nuclear arsenal. While staking out its claims in the western Pacific, China is not above provoking the United States into an occasional test of wills. Witness China's brinkmanship in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 or the four-day siege of the American compound in Beijing after the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade last year.

But all this is not yet what students of international relations call "balancing" or "ganging up." Power will match power, international-relations theory and history predict. If a behemoth like the United States towers over the international system, then powers two, three, four, etc. should link up against Mr. Big.

So why aren't they doing to the United States what they did to Napoleon after 1793 or to Stalin after 1945? Because, for today's "anti-hegemonists," power number one poses a delicate, difficult problem. First of all, this 800-pound gorilla does not thrash about in search of conquest and empire. Actually, this monster is more like an elephant—bumbling rather than bloodthirsty, oblivious rather than fierce.

Second, America is a pretty useful beast. When nasties like Saddam or Slobo need to be punished, it is the United States that organizes the posse. When North Korea angles for nuclear weapons, it is President Clinton who shows up with carrot and cudgel in hand. Japan can afford to be Japan because it gets American-made security nearly for free. Russia knows that the next International Monetary Fund bailout will require a nod from Washington. During the past century, bitter experience has taught the Europeans that there is no European security without Atlantic security. The Chinese would love to tell the Americans, "The Pacific is our lake: move over." But then there is that $50 billion trade surplus nobody else will grant them.

This is why the last remaining superpower has not (yet) provoked real ganging-up. But that doesn't mean America's rivals are happy. However haphazardly and fitfully, this gorilla *does* throw its weight around—bombing Iraq, sanctioning companies that invest in Cuba, clobbering the EU with retaliatory tariffs.

So what is a good anti-hegemonist to do? If your pique exceeds your clout and the beast is a necessary evil, you resort to psychological compensation, especially the assertion of moral superiority. This explains the paradox of the new anti-Americanism, especially in Europe. In the past, anti-Americanism was rooted in a reality of sorts. Recall the last chapter of the cold war, when the United States insisted that Europe accept its nuclear missiles, punish the "Evil Empire," and send forces to the Persian Gulf—all of which might have provoked Moscow and turned Europe into, as former West Berlin Mayor Heinrich Albertz put it, a "shooting gallery of the superpowers."

Today, the existential threat is gone, but elite discourse still crackles with animosity. After any well-publicized execution, European politicos denounce America's barbarism. When American kids go on killing sprees, it is proof positive of a sick society. Yet, when youngsters are hit with the full force of the law, that, too, proves that America is a troglodytic country. Before Times Square was Disneyfied, it was a monument to decadence; after it was cleaned up, it embodied the triumph of prudery and philistinism. If Washington hesitates over Bosnia or Kosovo, it refuses to lead; when its bombers fly, they are the leading edge of American imperialism.

Why is this anti-Americanism rather than legitimate criticism? Because the object of resentment is clobbered coming and going—just as Jews used to be vilified as both Bolsheviks and plutocrats. But why America, and why now?

Because the "hyperpower" is also the most alluring and seductive society in history. Napoleon had to rely on bayonets to spread France's revolutionary creed. In the American case, Munichers and Muscovites *want* what the avatar of ultramodernity has to offer. Let us count the ways: Ally McBeal and Bart Simpson, rap and hip-hop, in-line skates and the Internet, Harvard and Cal Tech. The first global civilization in history is "made in the USA."

No wonder America the ubiquitous riles the souls of those whose language, culture, and power once radiated from Madrid, Vienna, Paris, or Berlin. What do you do when the all-powerful is also the all-seductive? Take McDonald's, the most beloved target of European indignation. There are 780 "McDos" in France, the country that used to be synonymous with haute cuisine. Nobody ever had a Big Mac forced down his throat at gunpoint, but trash a McDo and you become a hero.

Worse, seduction is subversion. For now, America is the model to match. When Europeans bemoan the decline of their universities, they look to Harvard and Stanford with envy. Their TV series and game shows ape American trash. For politicos, a trip to Silicon Valley has become the pilgrimage of choice. If unemployment is frozen above ten percent, how about downsizing and deregulating, American-style? And let's cut taxes and unleash capital markets while we're at it.

This is revolutionary stuff. America is modernity's global steamroller, and to compete Europe has to emulate the barbarians. It has to rethink the social democratic state: short workweeks and long vacations, job security and munificent welfare benefits. Like any revolution, this one threatens old power, status, and entitlement structures. To catch up, Europe has to become in part what America already is, and it hates the idea as well as its purveyor. No wonder, then, that Europe insists on its cultural superiority, holding it up against the depraved and philistine ways of its eighteenth-century offspring.

What is the gorilla to do? It cannot solve Europe's problems nor curb its own internal dynamics. But it might remember that power comes with responsibility. The United States was actually quite good at this game during the early phase of its postwar hegemony, when it did well for itself by doing good for others. Back then, the United States constructed myriad international institutions like NATO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, all of which served the interests of not just America but of the lesser powers as well. Alas, today there is little enthusiasm for such a project in the United States. Monica is more gripping than Madrid. Also, why peer across the sea when you are looking at an IPO that will yield your first 300 million bucks?

JOSEF JOFFE

JOSEF JOFFE is Payne Lecturer at Stanford and publisher-designate of *Die Zeit* in Hamburg.

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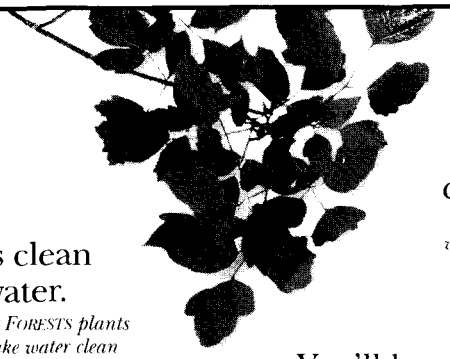

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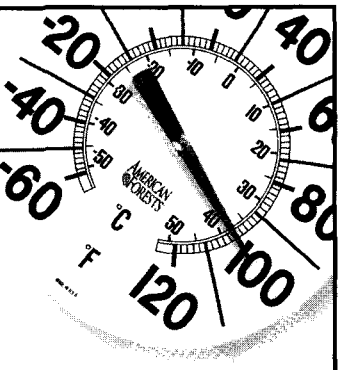

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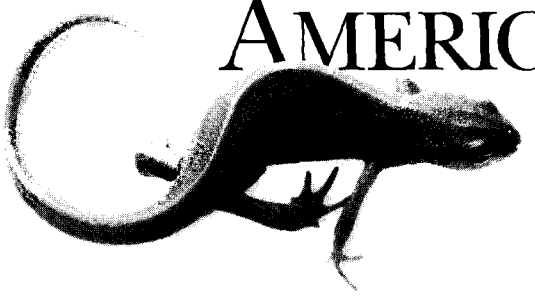

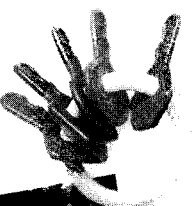

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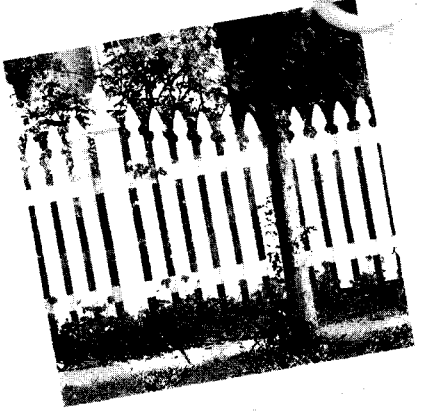

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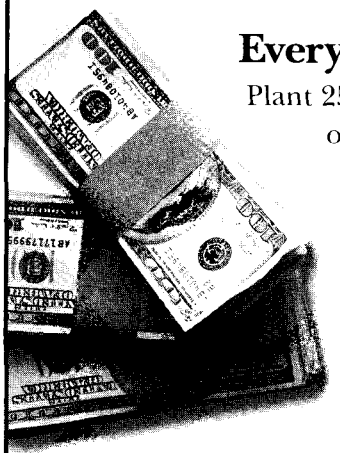

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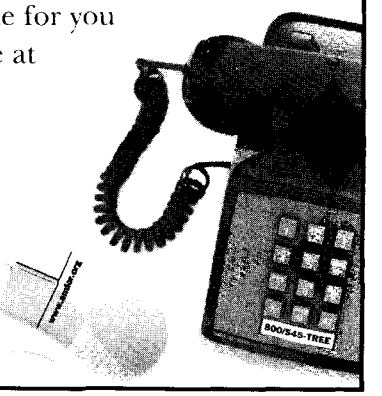

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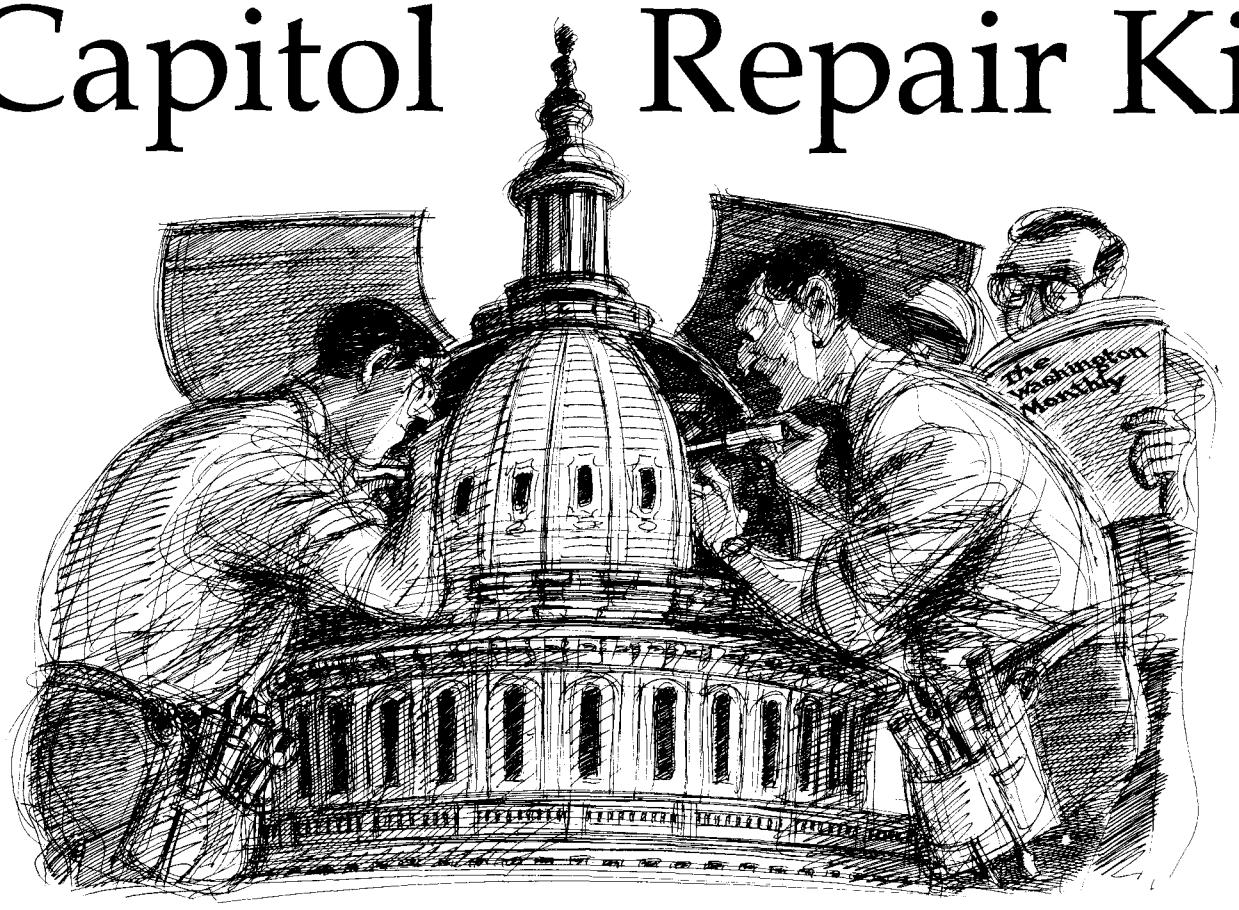

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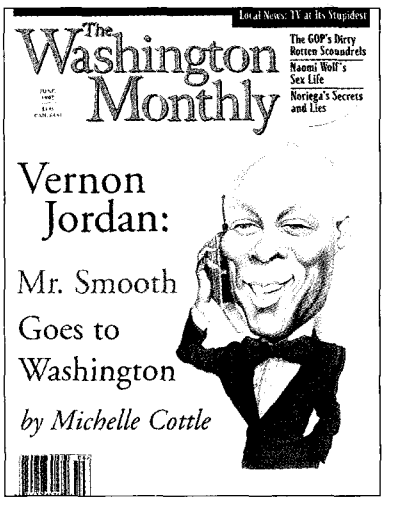
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Shepherdstown Blues

MILLENNIALISM IN Middle Eastern diplomacy has always taken the form of a "comprehensive peace," or the dream of it. Israel's peace with Egypt is more than two decades old; its de jure peace with Jordan is younger, but its de facto peace with Jordan is older; and its peace with the Palestinians is young but growing less and less fragile. These accomplishments, plus the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago, have had the additional wonderful consequence of weakening and isolating Syria. All in all, it is a picture of a healing region, in which reconciliation has been accomplished realistically, and compromise has been accompanied by vigilance—a stirring picture, except for the millennialists and the Syrians, for whom the exclusion of Damascus from the charmed diplomatic circle represents a fundamental historical flaw, as if peace that is not "comprehensive" is not peace.

It is the idyll of comprehensiveness that has brought Ehud Barak, Farouk al-Shara, and Bill Clinton to Shepherdstown, West Virginia. As soon as the talks convened, it started to rain; and the weather had a point. There is no evidence of exhilaration in these talks, and its absence is owed not merely to the obvious difficulty of the negotiation that lies ahead. It is owed also to historical memory. Syria is not a state that has any claim whatever upon the admiration and the sympathy of Israelis, Americans, and other seekers of mercy and justice. The courage of Anwar Sadat, the decency of King Hussein, the pragmatism of Yasir Arafat: None of these qualities have manifested themselves in Hafez al-Assad. He has always played a cynical and dirty game, within his borders and beyond his borders. There is something darkly comic about the Syrian sense of grievance.

The Syrian position in Shepherdstown appears to be this: In return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights and a return to the 1967 borders, Syria is fully prepared not to normalize relations with Israel. The Syrian negotiators have recoiled in indignation from the Israeli suggestion that Israeli troops withdraw not to the 1967 lines, which would put Syrian troops on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, but to the 1923 lines, which would put Syrian troops a few kilometers from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee; and from the Israeli suggestion that an early warning station be established on Mt. Hermon; and from the Israeli suggestion that Syrian troops not be deployed at the very provocative western edge of the Golan Heights. The Syrians have no time for Israel's concerns about its own security. They want to proceed directly to their rewards, which will include the modernization of the Syrian military by the United States.

What is in it for Israel? The answer is far from clear, at least to us. Ehud Barak promised the Israeli electorate that he would bring Israeli military casualties in Lebanon to an end; and Lebanon is now a Syrian satrapy; and it may be that the regime in Damascus, in return for everything it wants, and for no other reason, will crack down on Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad and the other local groupuscules of blood. Of course, Syria can crack down on the terrorists any day it wants, and thereby demonstrate its good intentions; except that it has no good intentions to demonstrate.

The Israeli government's apparent willingness to evacuate the Golan Heights, moreover, is premised on one of the great strategic fallacies of recent decades: that territory no longer matters. In the age of long-range ballistic missiles, it is said, death flies, and territory is no protection against it. It is certainly true that tanks cannot defend against missiles; but not all war is fought with missiles, and tanks can certainly defend against tanks. Territory may not be everything, from the standpoint of security; but it is not nothing. (The Gulf war and the Kosovo war proved these propositions.) And there is a political danger, too. Can the Israelis reasonably be asked to assent to the simultaneous creation of a Palestinian state on most of the West Bank and Gaza and a total surrender of the Golan to a profoundly belligerent regime that anyway will not last much longer? Surely the experiment with the Palestinians is more primary, morally and historically, than the experiment with the Syrians.

And what is in it for the United States? A bonanza for the defense industry, certainly; and an enhancement, always desperately needed, of Bill Clinton's legacy. "You shouldn't read *Great Expectations* or *Bleak House* into every arrival or departure of the president," James P. Rubin told reporters in Shepherdstown. Actually, it is *Our Mutual Friend* that has us worried. One of the president's interlocutors is a garden of democracy and capitalism and a proven ally of the United States, and the other is one of seven countries the State Department has designated as "state sponsors of international terrorism." Treating the two as equals in a common search for peace and magnanimity is a little grotesque, a little millennial. ■

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NOTEBOOK

The Washington Post

From: Len Downie, executive editor
To: Jackson Diehl, assistant managing editor/national
Re: Campaign profiles

I've noticed a crucial absence in our campaign coverage: not enough biographical and psychological examination of the hopefuls. Yes, we have made feints in this direction, but they've been appallingly superficial: the five-part series on Al Gore's youth (his whole youth, in five parts? Come on!); the seven-part series on Bill Bradley, from childhood tc candidacy; and, of course, the seven-parter on George W. Bush. It's true that we have established the basics–Tipper preparing sandwiches for Al in college, Bush playing stickball at Andover, Bradley as a "long, skinny, ugly baby"–but the basics are not enough. What are we, television? We need to probe deeper. How long a baby? How skinny?

An educated electorate cries out for more. Where did these candidates come from? What did they wear as children? Who were their friends? What did their friends wear? What does it mean when a woman makes a sandwich for a man? What are the psychic legacies of stickball? After all, when one of these men moves into Pennsylvania Avenue, he'll bring with him a lot of emotional baggage. We need a baggage correspondent.

Here are some thoughts (I list them in bullet form, perhaps as the result of a childhood that went by too fast):

• Sure, we know about John McCain's military service, but what about his father's? What psychological scars did it leave? How did it imprint itself on the young McCain? The adolescent McCain? The teenage McCain? McCain, the young man? A seventeen-part series should whet the appetite.

• We have a tip that Bradley, as a child, had a dog that died. I DO NOT WANT TO READ THIS IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. What was Bradley's relationship with his dog? How did Bradley mourn? Has it affected his views on health care? Is this why he has renounced the use of animal metaphors in the campaign? If Bradley won't talk (claiming, to shield the pain, that the topic is too trivial), we may have to go around him. Maybe we can dig up the dog's medical records. Or, if need be, its carcass.

• Thanks to the Post, the world now knows what Gore eats for lunch. But what about the other meals? There remain whole culinary universes–formal dinners, urban and rural cookouts, potlucks, ethnically diverse snacks–about which we know next to nothing. Did Gore's overbearing parents allow him to snack? Was it for the food that he loved his summers in Tennessee? What is it like to raid the icebox of a pushy father? Should Phyllis Richman cover next week's debate?

• I know Elizabeth Dole has dropped out, but let's not start cutting corners. When did they start calling her Liddy? Does it have some secret, coded meaning hidden from all but her closest confidantes for all these tortured years? Try David Maraniss. He really needs to earn his keep.

• Donald Trump has got more ex-wives than Woodward has ex-assistants. There's an important piece of public-interest journalism to be done here. Maybe one piece on the years with Ivana, another on the Marla era, and then a two-parter on the bachelor years. And what's with his handshake fetish? A lover of flesh who won't press the flesh: Am I the only one who sees the story?

• Word is that Steve Forbes sleeps in pajamas made of money. Who's on this? What denominations of bills? Hard money or soft money? Does he use public funds? Follow-up: Somebody at Kay's house the other night said Forbes may be a Martian. I want a top writer on this. Maybe Maraniss?

• We all know where Gary Bauer stands on the issues. But who is this guy? Did the other kids tease him in school? Does he have a pet? Why not? As a high school sophomore, Bauer was a junior-varsity wrestler. Is that why he has the strength to get up from the mat of his low poll numbers? This is the kind of enterprise reporting that wins Pulitzers. Tell Maraniss he really needs to get on this one. Those 200,000 words aren't going to write themselves.

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UNSTUCK: Cartoons, the professors of cultural studies teach us, may contain deep and even dangerous meanings. We see the point. The cartoon called James Carville has published a book called *Stickin': The Case for Loyalty*, as if the case for disloyalty were everywhere around us. Carville has been marketing his loyalty to Bill Clinton for years, and his devotion has been touching, even if it has a "Who are you going to believe, me or your lyin' eyes?" quality. But there is a chapter in his book that is not at all touching. Its subject is loyalty oaths, and it segues smoothly from the loyalty to Germany demanded by Adolf Hitler to the loyalty to America demanded by Joseph McCarthy. Among his observations, there is this: "The FBI had eighty thousand informants in the war industries during the Second World War. Ronald Reagan was FBI Agent T-10 when he was president of the Screen Actors Guild. It wasn't like East Germany when Stasi files were opened and wives found their husbands had spied on them for years for the secret police, but it was pretty bad. In order to protect ourselves from the communists it was as though we had to become more like the communists. Like an immunization—in order to protect you from the disease, i.e., totalitarianism, you have to give yourself some of the disease, i.e., a denial of civil liberties. The way to do that is to deny more civil liberties and become more totalitarian." *More* totalitarian? Needless to say, the enemies of civil liberties are all on the right: "This is a typical right-wing-thing—to talk the talk, but never to walk the walk. In the same breath they would demand that people take a loyalty oath to the Constitution, the methods that they were using were violating the same document.... Throughout history, some sections of the country just love to investigate people, to accuse and pry and keep digging around even if they can't find anything very much as they go." Get it? First there was Joseph McCarthy, then there was Kenneth Starr. (Does the name Jack Palladino mean anything to Carville?) Carville concludes the memorable passage cartoonishly: "Sometimes, when someone says they have a pailful of shit, all they have is a pailful of shit." Yep.

LOCAL BOY MAKES BOOK: We are pleased to announce that TNR contributing editor Robert Wright, author of this week's cover story and a former senior editor, has just published a book. You would be correct in inferring from its title—*Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*—that the book is not narrow in scope. If you're curious about the logic of human destiny in the aftermath of Seattle, turn to Wright's article, "Continental Drift," on page 18. ■

VINT'S WEEK

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Why the press didn't understand Y2K.

System Failure

By David Kestenbaum

I watched the millennium dawn from the ugly, windowless perch of the government's Y2K information center in Washington, D.C. Camped on the tenth floor, surrounded by mountains of food wrappers, more than 100 reporters listened for the whimpers of dying computers. When they never came, the members of the press turned, predictably, on their hosts. *The New York Times* asked on page one ("Vast Effort to Fix Computers Defended") whether the billions spent by corporations and the government had really been necessary or whether everyone had been duped by profit-hungry Y2K consultants.

But, in all the finger-pointing, the media overlooked one obvious villain: the media. That's right, we (and by we I mean, of course, they) share much of the blame. Just about every outlet covered Y2K wall-to-wall all year. The number and prominence of these reports, alarmist or not, left the impression that technological apocalypse was possible. In fact, the evidence to justify the hype was never there. Y2K mostly threatened accounting and billing systems, which have to endlessly calculate cash flows by subtracting the current date from one in the future. Unchecked, the bug could have damaged Medicare and Social Security, but not electric power, telephone lines, airplanes, or sewage systems. Sewage systems don't care what year it is.

But the "facts" were often too good to check. Few reporters pushed for specific examples of software or hardware that, unfixed, would cause the lights to go out. If they had, they would have found that there were none. Bruce McConnell, who runs the International Y2K Cooperation Center, backed by the United Nations, told me that in all his conversations with Y2K coordinators from nations around the world, he never came across a single device that, had it failed, would have meant catastrophe.

But the possibility was not exactly zero. And so, because no one could guarantee that nothing would happen, the story stayed alive. Reporters regularly and wrongly implied that if a system was noncompliant it was likely to fail. They rarely pointed out that "noncompliant" can mean something as un-newsworthy as printing the date on a form as 1900. Take, for instance, an Associated Press story that ran on August 20 in *The Washington Post*. The story began, "A Navy report predicts 'probable' or 'likely' failures in electrical and water systems for many cities because of the year 2000 technology problem." The report had appeared on the Web courtesy of a doomsayer (who still thinks the crisis isn't over, by the way). What the report, when read in its entirety, really showed was far more tame—that many cities had not proven they were Y2K-compliant. The AP and the *Post* never made that clear.

And, when reporters did point out examples of real-world Y2K failures, they often got them wrong. The oft-cited Y2K test of a sanitation plant that resulted in millions of gallons of sewage being spilled into a park outside Los Angeles had nothing to do with a date-dependent computer bug. When power was cycled off and on for the test, a valve defaulted to the open position, causing the spill. The *Los Angeles Times* reported the story but never clarified this.

When nothing had happened by 12:01 a.m. on January 1, the press was quick to say that the Y2K glitch had never been expected to hit at exactly the stroke of midnight. Too bad they didn't say that earlier. On December 30, "NBC Nightly News" hyped a small Y2K bug the Federal Aviation Administration deemed to pose no danger and then ended its report by saying, "But, in truth, no one can be certain until the key moments come." Networks promised the public that they would be there with 24-hour coverage should anything happen.

These and other reports gave people an excuse to panic. And, in the months leading up to the fateful day, U.S. Y2K czar John Koskinen spent much of his time holding no-news conferences, where heads of industry and government agencies swore that nothing was likely to happen. (McConnell has a chart on his wall showing how time spent managing p.r. overtook time spent fixing the bug itself.)

Koskinen and McConnell had to devote so much time to holding reporters' hands because the general-assignment reporters designated to cover Y2K didn't really understand the technology. Radio reporters seated around me at the Y2K center on December 31 filed stories on Y2K one minute and Boris Yeltsin's resignation the next.

Instead of understanding the problem technically, many reporters allowed it to become a metaphor, a Rorschach test for the public's, and their own, fears about technology. So, just as the press forever hypes teen computer-hacking, which is actually a minor problem, it hyped Y2K. Reporters, after all, are as envious of Bill Gates as everyone else is. Many secretly suspect there's something wrong with relying so heavily on machines we don't understand. Y2K seemed like some kind of terrible but deserved retribution in which the computer gurus would finally be brought low.

In fact, the real lessons are more pedestrian. Computers are a mixed bag. They simplify life for the people who use them, but they require a legion of information technology doctors to keep them healthy. Those people knew the Y2K problem was a nuisance, not a death warrant. And the press should have been able to speak their language. Maybe newspapers should hire a few more nerds—people who know which questions to ask and which assertions not to believe, people for whom technology is not magic and for whom a computer bug is not the apocalypse. It's just a computer bug. ■

David Kestenbaum is a science reporter at National Public Radio.

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Moscow Dispatch

Putin Himself First

By Masha Gessen

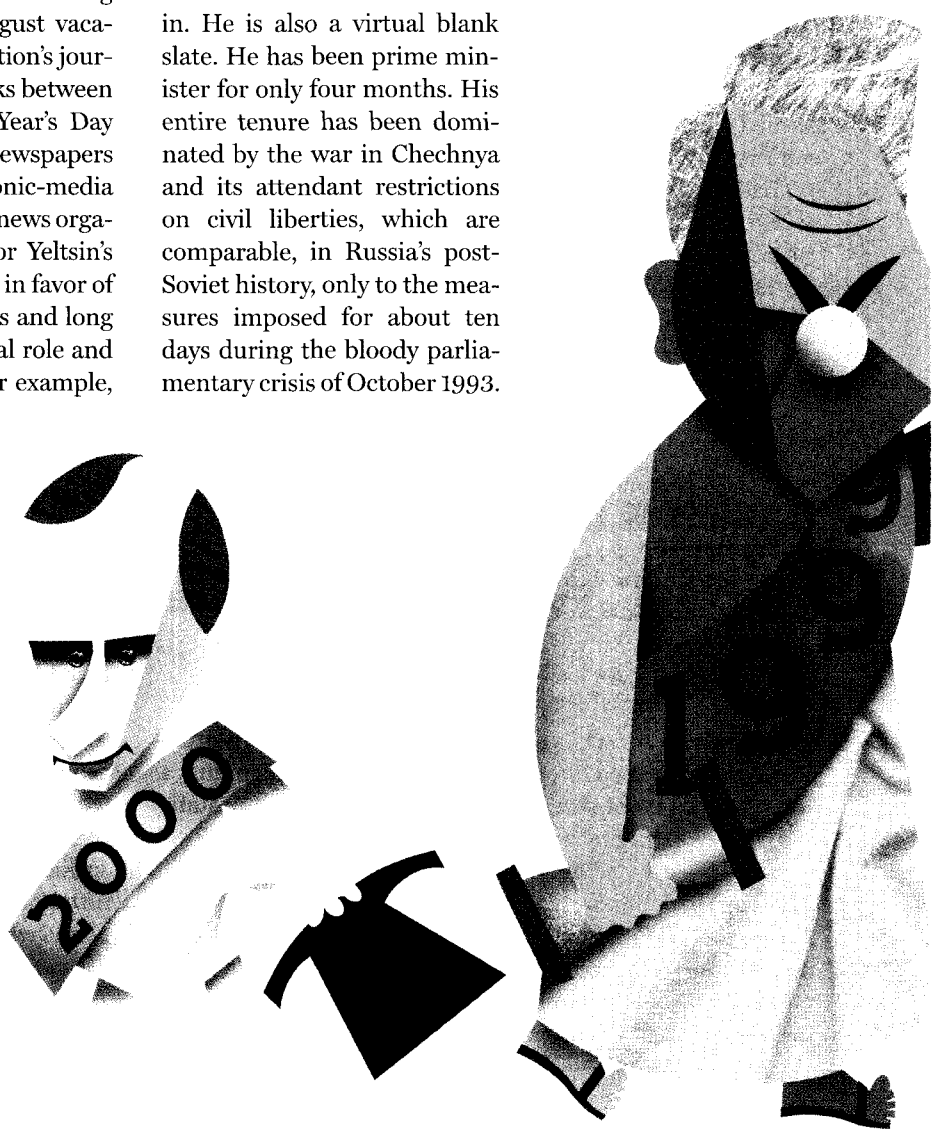
Give Boris Yeltsin his due: he upstaged the millennium. As December 31 passed into history in Moscow, radio countdowns of the century's best songs were overwhelmed by political talk shows. Rankings of the biggest news events of the millennium were shelved as commentators savored the real news taking place before their eyes. The focus of the traditional televised New Year's address was not the year being welcomed but the person doing the welcoming: Acting President Vladimir Putin.

The timing of Boris Yeltsin's resignation as Russian president was bizarre but in character. Long known for firing prime ministers on Sundays and during the August vacation season, Yeltsin once again struck when the nation's journalists were away from their desks. The three weeks between Western Christmas and the Old Russian New Year's Day (January 13) constitute Russia's dead season; newspapers stop publishing, pundits leave town, and electronic-media outlets operate with skeleton crews. Understaffed, news organizations had to use reports they had banked for Yeltsin's death. As a result, coverage was even more skewed in favor of the Kremlin than usual—short on current analysis and long on schmaltzy evocations of Yeltsin's great historical role and staggering political will. Privately owned NTV, for example, dipped into its archives for a film about Yeltsin's perestroika years—reminding viewers that in 1990 Yeltsin spent all of his foreign-lecture income on medical equipment for Sverdlovsk, the Ural Mountains city where he had served as party boss.

But it wasn't just media manipulation. Yeltsin's resignation speech rehumanized him in the eyes of many Russians. Western pundits have questioned whether Russians perceived Yeltsin's apology as sincere, but that misses the point. Russian TV viewers saw a clearly ill, struggling man who cried on camera. When he confessed to lying awake at night plagued by the difficulties of his people and wiped away a tear, they wanted to comfort him. This was the voice of an ailing patriarch, and in this country, where democratic reflexes are rudimentary but family traditions are rich—especially at New Year's, which is a family holiday much like Christmas in the United States—Yeltsin's former subjects were moved to do what one would for a dying father: ensure the best care and try to do his bidding in the little time he has left. To dwell on Yeltsin's flaws at such a time would have struck most Russians as gauche. And that is why Putin's decree guaranteeing Yeltsin lifetime pay and immunity from prosecution will not hurt him in the March elections. It might even help.

Even before Yeltsin's resignation, Putin looked like the strongest candidate going into a campaign that was supposed to last six months. But, in a country fighting a war and forever vulnerable to economic collapse, six months is a long time. If the war bogs down in the Chechen mountains, public support for it will wane, as will Putin's popularity. If the price of oil drops and takes Russia's fragile economy down with it, Putin also stands to lose. In both respects, cutting in half the time left before Election Day lessens the possibility of a comeback by any of the Kremlin's opponents, all of whom depleted their treasuries during December's parliamentary election campaign.

So Putin is a virtual shoo-in. He is also a virtual blank slate. He has been prime minister for only four months. His entire tenure has been dominated by the war in Chechnya and its attendant restrictions on civil liberties, which are comparable, in Russia's post-Soviet history, only to the measures imposed for about ten days during the bloody parliamentary crisis of October 1993.



DAVID COWLES

Masha Gessen is currently on leave from her position as chief correspondent of *Itogi*, the Russian partner to *Newsweek*.

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Perhaps aware of his vulnerability on this score, Putin, in his hastily written New Year's Eve address, promised that "freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of the mass media, the right to private property—all these basic principles of a civilized society will be reliably protected by the state." And, while he may lack credibility as a civil libertarian, so do his opponents: Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov; former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, another former intelligence chief but one with solid apparatchik credentials and a pronounced hatred of the media; and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, whose love of police-state tactics and blatant disregard for the constitution are legendary. With liberal-opposition leader Grigory Yavlinsky weaker than ever, virtually all the pro-democracy vote will, by default, go to Putin.

So a Putin presidency is probably cause for as much (and as little) celebration as Yeltsin's resignation itself. On the one hand, for the first time in Russian history a living ruler has relinquished power voluntarily, peacefully, and in full accordance with the law. Indeed, it is remarkable how clearly the procedures for presidential resignation and succession are codified when so many other Russian laws are incomprehensible or mutually contradictory. It is reassuring to know that an acting Russian president's powers and tenure are clearly and strictly circumscribed (if only the same could be said for a non-acting Russian president). Yeltsin, contrary to many predictions, did not try to retain power at any price, did not try to conjure some extralegal position within the newly formed Russian-Belarussian union, and did not plunge the country into constitutional crisis.

That's the good news. The bad news is that he didn't need to. He managed to rig an election—by calling it at the time most beneficial for the Kremlin and by openly appointing his successor—without even breaking the law. For the dazzled Russian people, huddling near their millennium-eve TV screens, it was yet further proof of Yeltsin's great historical role and staggering political will. ■

Jackson Dispatch

Near Miss

By CAROL FLAKE CHAPMAN

THE DAY BEFORE the Mississippi legislature opened its doors for the new millennium, a line of severe thunderstorms crossed the state, bringing tornadoes to several counties. However, no major rearrangements of the landscape were reported. Similarly, on January 4, when the Mississippi House took up its first big order of business—an unprecedented vote to choose the state's governor—it was clear that, for all the turbulence surrounding last November's gubernatorial election, it was hard to pinpoint the subtle changes in Mississippi's political terrain.

"The atmosphere in the House might be electric, but I think the whole thing's going to be anticlimactic," House Speaker Tim Ford drawled at a press luncheon the day before. And he was right. The chamber and gallery were packed for a historic vote whose outcome (given the overwhelming Democratic majority in the Mississippi House) was never in doubt.

It was a surprise, however, that the state reached this point at all. Lieutenant Governor Ronnie Musgrove, the Democratic candidate, had garnered some 8,300 more popular votes than Republican candidate Mike Parker, a former Congressman—enough to win outright in any other state in the union. But in Mississippi votes are also apportioned by legislative districts in a kind of mini-electoral-college system, so that Musgrove, according to the state constitution, needed to win not only by popular vote but by electoral vote as well. There are 122 legislative districts, and Musgrove had split the electoral vote evenly with Parker, with each receiving 61. When Parker refused to concede, the constitution kicked in, throwing the election to the House. Unlike the federal electoral college, however, Mississippi's is a "free will" system (or, as one representative put it, a "free-for-all" system) in which representatives are not bound by the votes of their districts.

The constitution Parker was at such pains to honor was once known as the Redeemer constitution, drawn up after Reconstruction to prevent blacks from winning statewide office. The provision requiring both popular and district electoral majorities wasn't the Redeemer constitution's most blatantly racist provision (which is why—unlike, say, the poll tax—it has hung on), but Parker's insistence on invoking it offended some black leaders nonetheless. "Mike Parker must have decided we need a barometer of how far Mississippi has come in the last hundred years—I can't imagine why else he wouldn't have conceded," says Wendell Paris, a civil rights leader from Jackson.

Other observers suggest not racial but psychological reasons for Parker's behavior. His loss, they theorize, must have thrown him into a state of shock. Polls had shown Parker cruising to victory, despite the total meltdown of Republican Governor Kirk Fordice's popularity following a series of scandalous revelations last summer. Fordice, who briefly headed Dan Quayle's presidential campaign and who has endlessly preached the importance of family values, had taken few pains to conceal an extramarital romance with his former high school sweetheart. The lovebirds were photographed together on a trip back from France. Fordice had acquired a fancy new love nest on the outskirts of Jackson without telling his popular wife, Pat, who is regarded by Mississippians as sort of a cross between Lady Bird Johnson and Jackie O. When confronted by a TV reporter as he left the new house, Fordice made the ultimate redneck threat: "I'm gonna whup your ass." And he seemed ready to back it up; he was later seen walking his dog with a pistol.

Mississippians were incensed. In a millennium poll taken by the Jackson *Clarion Ledger* to pick the best and worst things that had happened in Mississippi history, Fordice's "antics" tied with the murder of Emmett Till as third-worst (the abolition of school prayer came in first). Novelist John

CAROL FLAKE CHAPMAN has written several books, including *Redemptorama* and *New Orleans*.

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Grisham, who campaigned for Musgrove, has said that after Fordice even "Jesse Ventura would look good or Hulk Hogan or anybody would look good."

IN FACT, MISSISSIPPI found someone far milder than that. The state has a tradition of alternating its more flamboyant, populist governors ("kick-ass redneck" types, in the words of one local reporter) with more sedate, bookish leaders, and the 1999 election was no exception. The Republican primary should have been an omen. One candidate sold all his worldly possessions, including an antebellum home and two Cadillacs, to wage a Christian-values-based campaign, but he lost badly. The two candidates to emerge from the primaries were Musgrove and Parker, men who, in contrast to Fordice, seemed to weigh out their rhetoric in measuring spoons.

Despite being the most expensive in Mississippi history (the candidates together raised more than $5 million), the campaign lacked fire. Parker, a former funeral-home director, is the son of a Baptist preacher, and Musgrove, age 43, is a Southern Baptist deacon. The two played up their family images, with Parker airing an ad that featured high school yearbook photos of himself (voted "most handsome") and his wife (voted "most beautiful").

In fact, it was difficult to distinguish the candidates from each other. They both hail from the geographical spine running down the middle of the state—the area of small, church-heavy towns and red clay hills that have produced many of Mississippi's most prominent leaders. "They come from the same kind of people," says Marty Wiseman, who heads the John C. Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State University. During the election, he says, "they had to look for ways to disagree." Parker, in fact, had been a Democrat until he switched parties in 1995.

Musgrove, however, was the wonkier of the two. It was he who hammered the issues, particularly education and health care, with mind-numbing repetition. During the last weeks of the campaign, Musgrove's ads targeted Parker's votes over the course of ten years in Congress, while Parker stuck with vague, feel-good ads—by most accounts, a fatal choice.

Musgrove, in a sense, was the Al Gore of the race, relying on a kind of boring, focus-on-the-issues sincerity, while Parker played the George W. Bush role, depending upon his affable, laid-back charm and a middle-of-the-road brand of compassionate conservatism.

While Parker's folksy approach had worked in earlier races, this time his charm and vague family-values conservatism weren't quite enough. If Mississippians have traditionally voted for the person rather than the party, this time they seemed to vote for the issues—and the issues seemed to be on Musgrove's side, which may bode a subtle shift in the state's political makeup. After Fordice, Republicans have clearly lost their lock on family values, and they will have a difficult time reclaiming it anytime soon. But Democrats seem to have moved to the right culturally, while maintaining their edge on bread-and-butter economic issues like education and health care.

When the vote rolled around, there was the usual opening-day buzz in the elegantly restored capitol, with representatives surrounded by family and friends. A goodly number of legislators made their way to the governor's suite on the third floor, where Fordice was welcoming everyone with pastries, coffee, and a typically gracious prediction concerning his successor. "Come on in and have something good to eat and drink," he told one representative. "Musgrove is going to be serving animal crackers next year."

But Musgrove got the last laugh when the House vote transformed his squeaker of a popular vote into a landslide. The vote was 86 for Musgrove and 36 for Parker, a slightly larger margin than predicted. And, while Musgrove's dependence on the House for his election could have made a constitutionally weak governor even weaker, it appeared that the vote had actually given him momentum going into his first year of office. "He's out of a cannon," said Democratic state Representative Bobby Moak. Democrats, he said, had gained some momentum as well. "I think we're in a defining moment here," he said, reflecting on a party that as recently as a couple of years ago looked dead and buried in the Deep South and now claims the governorships of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

And a defining moment in other ways, as well. A constitution designed to keep blacks out of Mississippi politics had instead prompted the ceremonial election of a candidate backed by every black representative in the Mississippi House. Redeemer constitution, indeed. ■

Zagreb Dispatch

Go West, Young Country

By DAVID RIEFF

DURING THE WEEKS leading up to Croatia's January 3 parliamentary election, which resulted in the stunning victory of the opposition that will now form the country's next government, the reformers downplayed their chances. Yes, they agreed, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman's death had left the governing party he created, the HDZ, in disarray. And yes, unemployment stood at 25 percent, there was widespread public revulsion at the regime's corruption, and the polls suggested the reformers would win comfortably. Still, spokesmen for the opposition coalition—which included the left-leaning Social Democrats, led by Ivica Racan, Croatia's next prime minister, and the Social Liberals of Drazen Budisa, whose affinities lie more with Tony Blair—insisted that the results remained in doubt.

It was an anxiety echoed by the small band of human rights activists in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, who struggled so long against the repression of the Tudjman regime. "Remember Dewey-Truman," one told me shortly after I arrived, "or John Major's victory in 1992."

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And the skepticism was not wholly irrational. Even after Tudjman's death, his specter haunts Croatia. He was the most classically totalitarian figure to come to power since the end of the cold war. And he was a defiantly and unabashedly premodern figure, combining the vanity of Evita Peron, the ruthlessness of Augusto Pinochet, and the "put the women back in their place" attitudes of the pre-World War II European right.

For all the lip service Tudjman paid to Croatia's joining the West, his idea of economic liberalization amounted to little more than redistributing the assets of the Croatian state to his friends, family, and political supporters. By the end of Tudjman's life, Croatia had become an economic basket case, with living standards continuing to plummet long after the wars in Croatia and Bosnia had ended. By the late '90s, neither the handsome facades of the country's cities nor Croatia's veneer of a consumer society could conceal the rot.

And yet, if Tudjman was responsible for all these things, he was also almost single-handedly responsible for the existence of an independent Croatia. The youngest general in the history of Tito's Yugoslav National Army, Tudjman could easily have continued his brilliant career as a servant of Belgrade. Instead, he resigned his commission and later became a leader of the so-called Croatian spring of 1971. No project could have seemed less promising. With the exception of the Nazi puppet regime of Ante Pavelic, the history of Croatian nationalism over the last century and a half was one of defeat after defeat. But Tudjman persevered, and, after a bloody war of independence in which much of Croatia was devastated, he succeeded in establishing the first independent Croatian state in modern history. Because of this, even Croatians who loathed everything else he stood for held him in awe.

BUT ON DECEMBER 10, 1999, the king died. Most Croatian observers agree that had Tudjman lived, the opposition could never have prevailed, whatever the state of the country. "It was as if a spell had been lifted," said Nebosja Taraba, deputy editor of the Croatian newsmagazine *Globus*, as the first results rolled in late on election night.

By the next morning, it was clear that without Tudjman there was hardly any HDZ left. Mate Granic, Tudjman's foreign minister and the man who will be the HDZ's candidate in the presidential elections scheduled for the end of January, conceded defeat before even half of the ballots had been counted. But Granic leads the HDZ's "moderate wing." Others are less resigned. One hard-liner told me curtly, "This is Communism, Part II," and showed me his design for what he said should be the new Croatian flag—a hammer and sickle superimposed on the country's traditional red-and-white checkerboard emblem. He muttered darkly about the role of U.S. Ambassador William Montgomery in supporting the opposition. But the rout had been so overwhelming that he did not express himself with much conviction.

In the final days of the campaign, the HDZ tried desperately to invoke the old fears on which, at the height of his powers, Tudjman had played so brilliantly. A VOTE FOR RACAN IS A VOTE FOR SEX, DRUGS, AND ROCK AND ROLL, proclaimed one banner at a campaign rally. And, after Tudjman's death, HDZ operatives plastered the streets of Zagreb with photos of him, with a young child on his knee, below the words FOR THE FUTURE. Opposition militants, though, responded with a defiance that would have been inconceivable in the old dictator's lifetime. On poster after poster, a single scrawled word appeared: CANCELLED.

By Election Day, the results could be read on the faces of voters leaving the polling stations. HDZ loyalists exited morosely, while pro-opposition supporters exulted, the young leaping into the air and shouting and the old, who have suffered disproportionately from Croatia's economic decline, flashing discreet V-signs. Ordinary people, all too well-aware of the mistrust many in the West feel for the values Tudjman exemplified, spoke wistfully of finally becoming what one called a "decent, modern country." And, on election night, at the headquarters of Racan's Social Democratic Party, the rock music got louder and louder, as if to defy the HDZ.

Whether the euphoria will last is another question. Croatia's political system is similar to France's, and already some in Zagreb are predicting that the voters, having made Racan prime minister, will elect Granic president. What they foresee is "cohabitation," a Balkan version of the current French arrangement, in which the conservative Jacques Chirac is president and the socialist Lionel Jospin is prime minister. As if to prepare themselves, fervent opponents of the HDZ are insisting that Granic, who served Tudjman without demurral for a decade, privately never believed in the dictator's program.

But, no matter who is elected, the challenges facing post-Tudjman Croatia are awesome. Opposition leaders Budisa and Racan have little trouble naming their goals. "Our immediate task," Budisa told a Zagreb newspaper, "is to pull Croatia out of economic crisis, remove anomalies in our democratic system, and bring the country out of its international isolation." It will be easier said than done. Corruption has become a way of life in Croatia. It is the amalgamation of the venality of late-Titoism and the crony capitalism instituted by Tudjman to benefit his supporters all the way down to the village level. Moreover, the fact that modern Croatia was born in war and solidified during the Bosnian catastrophe means that it has yet to go through the difficult post-Communist transition that has occurred elsewhere in southeastern Europe. "We're ten years behind Bulgaria," said the journalist Denis Kuljic. "Bulgaria! Can you imagine?"

IN A GLOOMY moment during the campaign, Racan confided to a journalist that he might be unable to improve the conditions of ordinary Croatians as much as he wished. But, he added, "if we can change people's hearts, we will have accomplished a great deal." That comment, which he undoubtedly would now disavow, may prove prophetic. For, in the final analysis, Croatia's deepest problems have more to do with mentality than with economics.

For a decade, Tudjman governed less on a coherent ideology than on a mythology of a Croatian state reborn from the ashes. But while it may now be obvious that such allegorical thinking is antithetical both to good government and to prosperity, ordinary Croatians have no experience of democracy. They want to join the European Union, but, apart from

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the bedazzling fact that the EU countries are prosperous, they have no real understanding of what today's Europe is.

"You'll see," a Croatian friend remarked sardonically, "soon almost no one outside Herzegovina will admit to having supported Tudjman." She may be right. But the habits of mind, the little Tito and the little Tudjman that are so deeply ingrained not just in Croatian political relations but in everyday private relations as well, will be far harder to change than the composition of a parliament. ■

Santiago Dispatch

Lavin Last

By Anthony Faiola

Not so long ago, the autumn of the patriarch was turning into winter. Augusto Pinochet, the former dictator whose goose-stepping military presided over more than 3,000 murders and disappearances between 1973 and 1990, was under house arrest in London, fighting extradition to Madrid for a trial on his regime's atrocities. Half a world away, in the shadow of the snowcapped Andes, Chile's independent justice system, emboldened by Pinochet's absence and his international condemnation, was arresting his retired lieutenants like so many petty mobsters after Al Capone's fall.

Pinochet's bitterest pill, however, was that Ricardo Lagos, one of the boldest dissidents during the former dictator's military regime, was poised to become the first Socialist president in Chile since Pinochet's bloody coup ousted Salvador Allende almost a quarter of a century ago. Thus, the nation's third democratic presidential election since Pinochet seemed destined to bring the ex-dictator's disgrace full circle.

But, as polls closed following the first round of elections last month, it was Pinochet's right-wing supporters who clinked champagne glasses amid the red, white, and blue balloons of the Chilean flag. They were toasting baby-faced Joaquin Lavin, a 46-year-old economics Ph.D. from the University of Chicago who had been a minor adviser to Pinochet during the dictatorship and finished the night with more votes than any conservative candidate in Chile's modern history. Busting virtually all predictions, Lavin essentially tied Lagos, who had been expected to lead by three to six percentage points. Lavin's strong showing not only forced a runoff (which will take place January 16) but raised the real possibility that the right may win back La Moneda, the imposing presidential palace that still bears the scars of Pinochet's deadly 1973 assault. As Lavin greeted supporters, even he seemed slightly shocked. What had happened?

For one thing, Lavin casts himself as a youthful, nonpolitical progressive—a kinder, gentler "centrist" who has nothing in common with the menacing Prussian-style military men of old. The new Lavin style was on display during a recent campaign stop in the central Chilean town of Peñaflor. Lavin, sporting casual khakis and a yellow pullover, brought out his attractive wife and a few of his seven children to greet supporters after a warm-up concert by longhaired rockers. The energy from electric guitars blasting out Lou Bega's "Mambo No. 5" and from Lavin's high-voltage smile was more excitement than the quiet hamlet had seen in quite a while. "I am talking about a new Chile without political division, a country without a right or a left!" Lavin told the pumped-up crowd. "I'm talking about unity, I'm talking about peace!" The message between these lines: Hey! I'm not Pinochet! I'm tolerant! Look, I've even got guys with earrings onstage with me!

It's not hard to see why Lavin works so hard to set himself apart from Chile's traditional archconservatives. When you talk about the right here, you're not talking about Jesse Helms or even Pat Buchanan. You're talking about Mussolini—hypernationalism, even fascism. Characterized, above all, by a slavish devotion to Pinochet.

Take, for example, the scene one sunny morning nine months ago, when a gaggle of stately right-wing matrons gathered at the finely appointed Pinochet Foundation in Santiago's posh Las Condes neighborhood to await a ruling from the British House of Lords on Pinochet's fate. At first, the women cooed amiably to the foreign press assembled for the occasion: "Oh? You're from Washington? How divine! Why, my granddaughter goes to American University." But, as the robed justices appeared on big-screen televisions to announce that Pinochet was not immune from extradition, the sweet talk halted abruptly. "Faggots in dresses!" the ladies shrieked at the televisions. "British sons of bitches!" Words alone couldn't contain their fury. Soon, broad-shouldered grandes dames wearing designer clothing were smashing Chilean flags on the heads of the journalists.

Notwithstanding Lavin's images of moderation, the flag-waving grandmas of Las Condes form his base of support. And, while he might not be their ideal candidate, they have plenty of reasons to hope that he is less of a centrist than he's letting on. Lavin has thrown more than a few meaty bones to the archconservatives, staffing his team with personalities from the unreformed right, including Alberto Cardemil, a former Pinochet minister who is now one of Lavin's key advisers. And, while Lavin has tried to broaden the conservative agenda by speaking to the poor, the wealthy Pinochet-backing elites who form his support base make any attempts to truly take their needs into account difficult, if not impossible.

So why are the rest of Lavin's supporters—people who have steered clear of the right for decades—lining up behind him? Pinochet's absence from the country is certainly one factor. The ex-dictator's physical presence and still-powerful influence in Chile have given the impression during past elections that a vote for the right was a vote for Pinochet. "But Pinochet is gone, and that has removed a strong psychological barrier that has prevented people from voting for the right in

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the past," says Ricardo Israel, director of the Center for Political Studies at the University of Chile.

Another reason is that many Chileans are preoccupied with the brutal economic recession that has plagued the country this year and generally resent their country's large gap between rich and poor—which has widened despite Chile's recent economic growth. Lavin has largely focused his campaign around these concerns, using populist techniques similar to those of Peru's president, Alberto Fujimori. Lagos, Lavin's Socialist rival, has also made economic reform the cornerstone of his campaign. Indeed, he has dropped the old Communist-inspired nationalization schemes once favored by his party in favor of a Tony Blair-influenced "third way" economic policy that should theoretically have widespread appeal. But, unlike Blair—and, more importantly, unlike Lavin—Lagos's delivery of this message is stodgy at best. In contrast to Lavin's flashy rock-and-roll speeches and Carnival-in-Rio parades, Lagos favors dry tours of community centers and union halls with local politicians.

Still, given the similarity between the two candidates' economic messages—if not their actual economic programs—the difference between their campaign styles cannot by itself explain the willingness of so many Chileans to overcome their traditional mistrust of the right and go with Lavin.

Underlying this willingness is another, more disturbing phenomenon. For all their horror at the thousands of murders under Pinochet's dictatorship and for all the protests by hundreds of grief-stricken families whose loved ones remain missing, the majority of Chileans would prefer not to dig up the past. In the early years after Pinochet stepped down, this was partly out of concern that the military might retaliate against investigations of their crimes by once again seizing power. But even today, with the danger of a military coup much diminished, many Chileans remain reluctant to dredge up their country's dark secrets. There is a sense of collective guilt. And there is also a feeling that, given Chile's current economic troubles, the nation would be better served by focusing its energies on the future rather than the past.

For all these reasons, the centrist Christian Democratic government that has ruled Chile for the past ten years largely refrained from addressing Pinochet's crimes. And, while Lagos has been touting a message of greater justice and deeper democracy that implies a departure from the old "let's not rock the boat" approach, Lavin would maintain the old silence. Though he has largely disavowed Pinochet, he has also said he would keep these "political issues" (read: investigation of and compensation for Pinochet's crimes) off the national agenda.

Though Lagos may yet pull out a victory, the evident popularity of Lavin's message causes the families of Pinochet's victims tremendous anguish. "As I watched the results coming in [on election night], I felt like crying for my country," said Viviana Diaz, president of the Families of the Disappeared. The walls of her headquarters are covered with black-and-white photos of the missing with the words "Where is he?" or "Where is she?" printed below. "Every time we take one step toward justice in this country, it seems like everyone becomes frightened and suddenly sticks their heads back in the sand. And that's what Lavin is about." ■

World government is coming. Deal with it.

Continental Drift

By ROBERT WRIGHT

IN RECENT YEARS, more and more people have raised the specter of world government. Ralph Nader, protesters in Seattle, Pat Buchanan, militiamen in the heartland—all sense an alarming concentration of planetary power in one or more acronyms: WTO, U.N., IMF, and so forth.

Of course, these people have something else in common: They are widely considered fringe characters—flaky, if not loony. And their eccentric visions have been punctured by legions of sober observers. "The WTO is not a world government," an economist wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed last month after the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization. His verdict has been echoed by various academics and pundits.

But this may be one of those cases when the flaky are closer to the truth than the sober. Much power now vested in the nation-state is indeed starting to migrate to international institutions, and one of these is the WTO. This doesn't mean that two or three decades from now we'll see world government in the classic sense of the term—a single, central planetary authority. But world government of a meaningful if more diffuse sort is probably in the cards. It follows from basic technological trends and stubborn economic and political logic. And, what's more, it's a good idea. Among other virtues, it could keep a sizable chunk of the liberal coalition from veering off toward Buchananism.

If the political forces driving the WTO toward firmer and broader authority seem less than overwhelming, one reason is that the key political players have a love-hate relationship with world government and tend to dwell on the hate part.

Many on the left, when denouncing the WTO, talk as if national sovereignty were sacred. The WTO, Nader has long

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complained, "means foreign regulation of America. It means any two dictatorships can out-vote us.... It means secret tribunals can rule against our laws." Yet Nader and most of the Seattle left would gladly accept a sovereignty-crushing world body if it followed the leftish model of supranational governance found in the European Union. Indeed, it was partly to please the Seattle activists that President Clinton espoused a future WTO whose member nations would meet global environmental and labor standards or else face sanction.

Many centrist and conservative free-traders also talk as if national sovereignty should be inviolable. They were aghast at Clinton's proposal to take the WTO "beyond its proper competence," as an editorial in *The Economist* sternly put it. But they can live with sovereignty infringement of a less leftish variety—the kind that erodes a nation's power to erect subtle trade barriers via environmental or health policy. They certainly didn't lose sleep over the famous 1998 case in which the United States, under threat of WTO sanction, relaxed its ban on shrimp caught in nets that kill sea turtles.

Of course, these free-traders deny that this sort of ruling amounts to world government. The *Economist* editorial said that "the WTO is not a global government" but merely a place where nations "make agreements, and then subject themselves to arbitration in the event of a dispute." But isn't that a large part of what a government is: a body whose constituents agree to respect its authority, to accept punishment if they're deemed to have broken the rules?

Assorted other players, such as human rights hawks, also have mixed feelings about world government. After Seattle, William Safire wrote a column backing Clinton's view that the WTO should someday punish nations that exploit child labor. This is quite a turnaround: Safire, a longtime free-trader and something of a libertarian, now believes that foreigners in Geneva should decide whether you can buy a soccer ball made in Pakistan. Struggling to contain his cognitive dissonance, Safire issued a disclaimer: "I am not a global warmnik.... Indeed, laissez-fairies have always been dancing in my garden." If I were Safire, I'd peek out at my garden to see whether the fairies are still in a festive mood.

For all these people—traditional leftists, centrist and right-wing free-traders, and assorted single-issue agitators (everyone except the Buchananites, basically)—the fundamental question has been settled. They agree that sometimes nations should surrender an appreciable chunk of sovereignty to a central authority. They just disagree on when. Even as they heap scorn on the notion of world government, they're really arguing about what kind of world government we should have.

THE EVOLUTION OF world government has two basic engines—stubborn economic logic and stubborn political logic, both fueled by technology's relentless shrinking of the economic distance between nations.

The economic logic is pretty simple. You could describe it as a series of non-zero-sum games—a series of cases in which nations, to achieve win-win outcomes or avoid lose-lose outcomes, enmesh themselves in common governance. The series starts with that elementally human non-zero-sum game, mutually profitable exchange. Nations trade with one another. Then they see further gains in agreements that will mutually lower tariffs (game number two). Then they decide all would benefit by dampening quarrels over what constitutes a violation of the rules, so they set up a way to handle disputes (game number three). Crossing this last threshold—forming an inchoate judiciary—is what turned the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade into the World Trade Organization.

But adjudication entails tricky questions. For example: How do you handle covert trade barriers? When a country makes it illegal to import shrimp caught in nets that kill sea turtles, is that just an environmental law? Or is it de facto protectionism, as the WTO claimed when it demanded that the United States quit barring shrimp imports from several Asian nations? In theory, the United States could have ignored the ruling. All the WTO would have done in response would have been to approve retaliatory tariffs by aggrieved countries. Still, the United States has benefited from so many WTO rulings that it has a stake in preserving respect for them. That's the way good government works: A central authority, by solving non-zero-sum problems, gives out in benefits more than it exacts in costs, thus justifying its existence. This net benefit is why WTO rulings will probably become more binding, whether through sheer custom or through tougher sanctions.

THE WTO ISN'T breaking new ground here. It's following in the footsteps of a body that's much further down the road of supranational governance: the European Union. Europe is the most geographically dense conglomeration of high-tech nations in the world. So, as technology shrinks economic distance, Europe is on the leading edge of the trend. That doesn't mean that its political present is the world's political future. The EU has been shaped by various elements peculiar to European history (including a dogged post-1945 desire to avoid war). Still, it may offer a hint of things to come.

For example: With transnational commerce growing, all of Europe's national currencies became a bother. There was costly currency conversion and uncertainty about exchange rates. So the EU opted for a single currency. And one currency meant one central bank; each nation lost its autonomous central bank and, at a more symbolic level, its currency (or, as they aptly say in Britain, its sovereign). At this point—with nations surrendering control over their monetary policy—the line between a loose association of nations and an outright confederacy has arguably been crossed.

As Europe was unifying its currencies, *The Economist* published an article called "One World, One Money," noting the analogously powerful logic behind global monetary union. The article stressed the political difficulty of such a goal, and some economists doubt its economic wisdom as well. Still, as exchange rates gyrated after the Asian financial crisis, there was talk in both Argentina and Mexico about adopting the U.S. dollar as official currency.

The EU also gets involved in regulatory issues, from food

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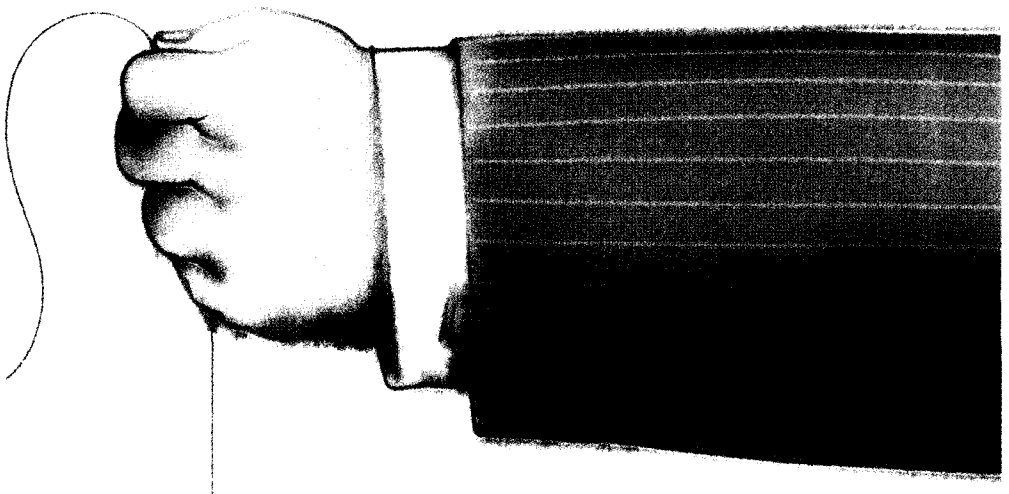
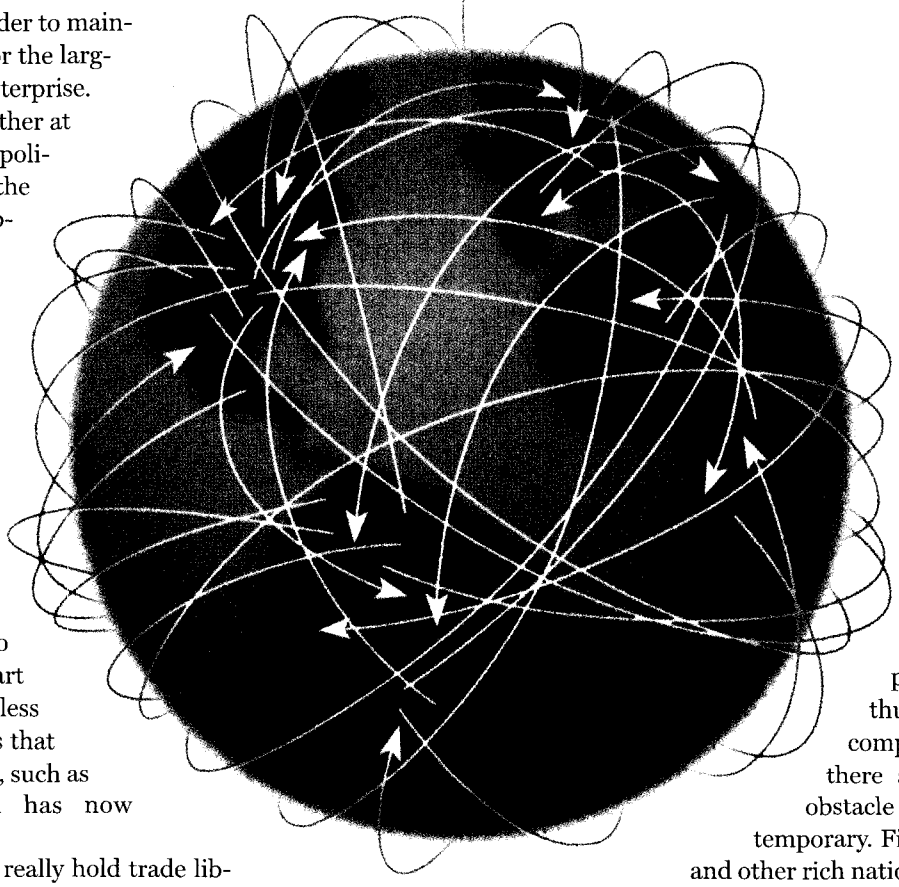
labeling to health and labor law. (It decided that member states could—and, indeed, must!—permit the sale of Viagra.) Right-wing free-traders claim there is no sound economic rationale for this sort of meddling. They say that the EU's attempt to specify everything from cheese labels to the maximum length of the workweek represents the triumph of interest-group politics. In some cases, at least, this is true; a maximum workweek doesn't follow from Econ 101 principles about maximizing GDP. But so what? Interest-group politics has always been part of governance. At the local and national levels, much of government consists of services rendered to various groups in order to maintain their support for the larger governmental enterprise. The question is whether at the global level, too, politics will dictate the construction of a substantial body of law.





There is reason to think so, and much of it was on display in Seattle. Well-organized interest groups in affluent nations fear—correctly, in many cases—that they'll be hurt by the continued lowering of trade barriers. So they want to thwart further lowering unless they get global rules that will blunt its impact, such as the rules Clinton has now embraced.

Can these groups really hold trade liberalization hostage to their agenda? Absolutely. In 1997, Clinton introduced fast-track legislation, which denies Congress the power to amend negotiated trade deals before voting on them—and which, practically speaking, is a prerequisite for passing most trade accords. Bowing to Republican pressure, Clinton phrased the legislation narrowly: it wouldn't have allowed U.S. negotiators to include labor and environmental rules in trade agreements. Liberal interest groups responded by defeating the bill. So for now, at least, America's real-world political choice seems to be either trade liberalization that invites lefty supranational governance or no trade liberalization. Both Democratic presidential candidates seem to favor the former option, and, if elected, each of them would presumably seek the leftish fast-track authority that Clinton didn't seek.

In the short run, this authority would yield little. Developing nations generally oppose global environmental and labor law, which raises production costs and thus dulls their factories' competitive edge. Still, there are two reasons this obstacle will probably prove temporary. First, the United States and other rich nations, with markets that poorer nations lust after, have tremendous bargaining power. Second, as time passes, the developing nations will themselves develop strong constituencies for left-leaning world law.

This second point was lost in the post-Seattle commentary. Negotiators for developing nations went on television and alleged that American union leaders, with their poignant pleas for better working conditions abroad, were phonies; they were at heart worried not about protecting foreign workers but about making foreign labor more pricey and hence less competitive internationally.

Absolutely true. In fact, many American workers would love to price foreign workers out of the market entirely. But they never will. A more realistic goal is to *slightly* raise labor costs abroad. And, if they do that, they'll have most foreign

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workers on their side. Sure, a few children will lose their jobs if child labor is regulated. And, sure, if workers in poor nations are guaranteed the right to organize, the result could be a minimum wage that would put a few adult workers out of jobs. But the American minimum wage has the same effect, and most workers still support it, for quite rational reasons.

So, in coming years, expect workers in poor nations to link up with Western labor groups to pursue their common cause: higher wages in poor nations. The groups won't see eye-to-eye on everything. American workers would like to raise environmental standards abroad as a way to increase production costs, whereas foreign workers will prefer the sort of raised production costs that mean higher wages. Still, there will be enough common interest that, to some extent, workers of the world will unite—if not exactly in the context Marx envisioned.

Other international coalitions will also blossom. Western environmentalists, for example, share an interest with Third World tourist industries in cleaning up Third World cities.

As international lobby groups acquire power and start doing the things national lobby groups have long done, economists and industrialists will grumble about the costs. The special interests, they'll say, are gumming up the works, dulling capitalism's edge, slowing down globalization!

And it will be true. But is that so bad? Globalization has polluted developing nations, dislocated workers in developed nations, and radicalized some environmentalists and religious fundamentalists. And radicalism is a special problem when, thanks to advancing weapons technology, any two or three highly alienated people can create a pretty lethal terrorist cell.

Don't get me wrong. Globalization is great. On balance, it makes the world's poor people less poor (a fact that doesn't seem to have penetrated the brain of the average Seattle protester). And it fosters a fine-grained economic interdependence that makes war among nations less thinkable. But these benefits are all the more reason to keep globalization from getting derailed by the reactionary backlash it incites when it moves too fast. And derailment is possible. As Paul Krugman recently noted in *The New York Times*, the "First Global Economy"—the one that took shape in the late nineteenth century—foundered early this century in part because its constituency didn't extend very far beyond a cosmopolitan elite.

Nor is the derailment of globalization per se the only thing to worry about. Some historians trace the virulence of twentieth-century German nationalism to the nineteenth century, when industrialization swept from west to east, leaving bewilderment in its wake. And Russia, even more than Germany, had to fast-forward from an age of serfs into the industrial revolution—and, in a sense, it never recovered, never got fitting governance. It got Stalin instead.

In a way, it's a misnomer to speak of slowing globalization. After all, the things that might do the slowing—supranational labor or environmental groups, global bodies of governance—are themselves part of globalization. What is really happening is that *political* globalization is catching up to *economic* globalization.

This has a precedent on a smaller scale. In the United States during the early twentieth century, as economic activity migrated from the state to the national level, the national government grew powerful enough to regulate it. Some of these regulations made simple economic sense, but some of them—labor laws in particular—were political in rationale and had the effect of subduing capitalism, dulling its harsher edges. This was, among other things, a preemptive strike against Marxist revolution—against the turmoil that unbridled modernization can bring—and a successful one. Enlightened capitalists realized that giving labor a seat at the table would help make the world safe for capitalism.

By the same token, enlightened capitalists should today invite the Seattle protesters indoors. One way or another, people who feel threatened by globalization will make their influence felt. Either they'll modulate globalization by linking up with like-minded groups abroad to help shape international rules or they'll take the economic-nationalist route and lobby for the sort of trade barriers that, in addition to starting trade wars, often involve xenophobia and nativism. The way to keep these people from being sheer protectionists—and, in some cases, from morphing into full-fledged Buchananites—is to turn them into WTO lobbyists, which means making the WTO a body worth lobbying. Put suits on those scraggly rabble-rousers and send them to Geneva!

The WTO, though the topic of world governance du jour, is hardly the only global institution with real economic power. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) makes loans to troubled nations to prevent panics—the rough analogue of a nation's bank-deposit insurance—and in return asks for sound management and transparent bookkeeping. This may not sound very forceful. But to lend when the private sector refuses to do so is to subsidize, and with subsidy comes power. Much of the U.S. government's power over states, after all, consists not of legalized coercion but of strings attached to subsidies.

After the Asian crisis, some economists argued that the IMF had been too heavy-handed—that it shouldn't demand fiscal austerity so single-mindedly and that by too readily bailing out bad investors it encouraged more bad investment. But almost no one is saying the IMF should quit lending altogether, and almost no one is saying it should quit using its lending as leverage of one sort or another. As with the WTO, the mainstream argument isn't about whether to have a form of world government but about what form of it to have.

And, as with the WTO, the reason to expect the IMF's ongoing solidification is simple. Its authority results from shrinking economic distance. This shrinkage is the reason economic downturns can be contagious, the reason rich nations suddenly care about the financial soundness of poor nations. And if there is one thing the basic direction of technological change clearly implies, it is continued shrinkage—more interdependence among nations.

For that matter, the shrinkage of noneconomic distance will also continue. A decade from now, global laws regulating the prescription of antibiotics could make sense, if the too-

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casual use of these drugs creates strains of super-bacteria that can cross oceans on airplanes. And then there is cyberspace, that notorious distance-shrinker and sovereignty-sapper. It empowers offshore tax-evaders, offshore libelers, offshore copyright-violators. Nations will find it harder and harder to enforce more and more laws unless they coordinate law enforcement and, in some cases, the laws themselves.

But, even given all these reasons for firmer and broader global governance, will it ever get as firm and broad as the governance of nation-states? Probably not. World government may well always rely on member states to levy its sanctions. It will probably never inspire the patriotic fervor nations do. And it may always be diffuse, consisting of lots of partly overlapping bodies: some regional, some global; some economic, some environmental; some comprising national governments, some comprising nongovernmental organizations.

Why won't world government ever be as taut as old-fashioned national government? For one thing, governments have traditionally drawn internal strength from external opposition. If you scan the historical and prehistoric record for distant parallels to the current moment, the nearest approximations you'll find are when agrarian villages have united to form "chiefdoms" or when chiefdoms evolved into ancient states. And there are no clear examples of such transitions happening in the absence of external hostility. For a full-fledged global political conglomeration to take place without the threat of war against a common foe would mark a contrast with all of the known past. And, barring an invasion from outer space, no such threat will be available.

Still, we do face what you could call planetary security problems, and they will help sustain the current drift toward real, if loose, world government. Impending climate change may not have quite the viscerally galvanizing effect of troops massed on your border, but it does qualify as a common peril best combated by concerted action. Terrorism is also a common peril (and, actually, a pretty galvanizing one). As more compact, lethal, and long-range weapons make terrorists tougher, national governance will become less and less adequate to the task of national security.

Already, with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the United States has agreed to international inspections intrusive enough to have filled the Senate chamber with plaints about surrendered sovereignty. But the surrender (a minor one, in truth) was rational; permitting such inspections on our soil is the only way to get them to happen on foreign soil. And chemical weapons are just the beginning. Biological weapons are orders of magnitude more lethal and much easier to make covertly. The encroachment on sovereignty that combating them will require is, to current sensibilities, shocking. But the idea of trauma—say, 20,000 deaths in an American city—has a way of making the unthinkable widely thought.

As technology pulls and pushes nations together, it highlights an irony: world government, which for so long was a pet cause of the idealistic left—the "woolly minded one-worlders"—isn't getting much support from the left. True, some Seattle activists profess a willingness to work with a left-leaning WTO. But when Naderite Lori Wallach declared, "We're the coalition that's going to tell the WTO, 'You're going to be fixed or you're going to be nixed,'" her heart seemed to be with the "nixed" part. Certainly that was the sentiment of the average Seattle protester.

But, even if nixing were within the left's power, it would be a mistake. Stopping the WTO in its tracks wouldn't turn back the clock. Under current tariff levels, globalization would continue (and, besides, tariffs would probably keep dropping via bilateral trade deals). The various problems that exercise the left—environmental decline, an exodus of low-skill jobs from high-wage nations, human rights violations—would persist.

And these problems are just about impossible to solve without an enforcement mechanism—without the power of sanction that the WTO, more than any other world body, has to offer. The Rio accords on global warming, for example, lack an enforcement mechanism and are notable for the blithe disregard with which various signatories have treated them. The history of international labor accords tells the same story. After the Seattle talks, a *New York Times* editorial said that "the administration can urge other groups, like the International Labor Organization, to pursue the issue with or without the WTO's participation." Which is to say, with or without effect. The ILO has been in existence for 81 years and, lacking the force of sanction, has been unable to do much of anything.

One oddity in contemporary political nomenclature is the tendency of leftist economic nationalists, who favor raising tariffs, to call themselves "progressives." Early this century, progressives were people who realized that communications and transportation technologies were pushing the compass of economic activity outward, from individual states to the United States. In response, they pushed economic regulation from the state to the federal level. The modern-day successors to these progressives should be advocating supranational regulation, not impeding it with unilateral tariffs.

Seattle may have moved them in that direction. At the end of the week, however virulent the anti-WTO rhetoric remained, the "progressive" left was thinking more seriously about using the WTO as a vehicle for its agenda. One big reason was Bill Clinton. For an American president to say that global laws on the treatment of workers should be enforced with real sanctions authorized by a worldwide body was a milestone in the evolution of global governance.

Clinton's remarks have been dismissed as a transparent ploy to lock up the labor vote for Al Gore, as a nostalgic effort to bond with 1960s-esque protesters, and as a tactical blunder that alienated negotiators from poor nations. All of this may be true. But it's also true that these days Clinton is said to be preoccupied with his legacy, trying to pave the way for a thumbs-up verdict from historians a generation hence. If so, then one-worlders should be cheered by his Seattle performance. No one has ever accused Bill Clinton of not knowing which way the wind is blowing. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Some Intricacies; A Farewell

All of us remember that in every Alfred Hitchcock film he himself is briefly seen. In a sense he can also be seen in some films made since his death, and not briefly. The latest instance is **The Talented Mr. Ripley** (Paramount-Miramax). It's derived from the well-known novel by Patricia Highsmith, an immediate link with Hitchcock: one of his films, *Strangers on a Train*, was derived from a Highsmith novel. The linkage grows as we watch *Mr. Ripley* because it yearns throughout to suggest Hitchcock.

Tom Ripley is a young pianist who works as a washroom attendant in New York in the late 1950s. He plays the piano at a party and thus meets Herbert Greenleaf, a rich man with a wastrel son who does his wastreling in Italy. Greenleaf mistakes Ripley for a Princeton graduate like his son, Dickie, and he hires Tom to go to Italy and persuade Dickie to return. (A faint echo here of Lambert Strether's mission in James's *The Ambassadors*.) In a town on the Amalfi drive, Tom, who has gifts of fakery and mimicry, makes Dickie's acquaintance, and he improves matters by being amusing. Dickie has a girlfriend who is a writer, but like his other friends, he himself is dedicated to hedonism. (I was in Italy for a year at about this time and saw this genus of Americans at pumped-up expatriate play.)

Tom, it soon becomes clear, is both an adventurer and a velvety sociopath. He is after what he can get for himself and can adjust his morality to further his plans for wealth and station. Several shades of eroticism color his exploits, including, when advantageous, homoeroticism. Murder, unplanned but unblinked, arrives more than once. The finish of the film is as bitter and wry as all who have been enjoying the film would want.

The plot, which—even as compacted here—sounds like a possible Hitchcock, is supposed to be serpentine, coiling around us insidiously before we realize that we are trapped. But sheerly as plot, the screenplay has so many weaknesses that we must wonder at Tom's good luck: there are no passersby at certain crucial moments, visitors arrive and depart exactly when it fits the plot, the Italian police are helpfully inefficient.

The Talented Mr. Ripley would be only a somewhat pretentious, patchy thriller except for the Hitchcockian air that envelops it. I haven't read Highsmith so can't comment on the adaptation, but the adapter-director, Anthony Minghella, was being measured for Hitchcockian laurels as soon as he announced the film. He had made *The English Patient*, widely celebrated, and many critical mouths were watering in advance for the next feast. For myself, I thought his earlier film was distended and sententious, and ended ridiculously. (Even those who carol about his new film make quick, nervous remarks about its ending.) But what is unmistakable in *Mr. Ripley* and its reception is its entry into the Hitchcock circle. A film about deception and murder, smoothly edited, with flossy dialogue, with clues that are dropped somewhat pointedly in order to be picked up later, with an ironic finish—Minghella is mimicking Hitchcock much as Tom mimicks a smooth Princeton grad. Well, Minghella will probably get his just deserts: *Mr. Ripley* is surely slated for the same academic analysis as the maestro's films. Academic analysts are always hungry for analysable material.

Two members of the cast, Jude Law as Dickie and Philip Seymour Hoffman as a veteran idler, are vivid. Matt Damon as Tom is Matt Damon as anyone, doing and saying what is expected of him with passable ease. As Dickie's girlfriend, Gwyneth Paltrow, who was surprisingly fresh in *Shakespeare in Love*, returns to her previous blandness. John Seale's cinematography is disappointing. He worked richly in *Witness* and *Rain Man* and *The English Patient*. Here he reduces the Amalfi drive and the Piazza Navona in Rome and Santa Maria della Salute in Venice to postcards.

Note: Highsmith's novel was filmed once before, in 1959, by René Clement under the title *Purple Noon*. (I saw it but don't remember it well enough to compare it with this second try.)

Oliver Stone's **Any Given Sunday** (Warner Bros.) is schismatic. First, he plainly wanted to make the definitive film about professional football. The trouble with this aim is that pro football doesn't need definition: it defines itself on any given Sunday. Do we really need a film to clarify the elements of warfare, gladiatorial combat, corporate competition, vicarious sadism and masochism that every game lays right in our laps?

In his apparent eagerness to grapple with this subject, Stone settled for a story by Daniel Pyne and John Logan that is basically familiar: the coach's blunt locker-room talks, the player who risks his life to play with an injury because he needs the money, the final game that must be won. Stone then wrote the screenplay with Logan (and wrote himself in briefly as a sports announcer). Not one moment of the script as such is interesting, especially the by-play with the female owner of the team. (Remember Paul Newman in *Slap Shot* as a hockey player on a team with an attractive female owner.) Matters are not helped by Al Pacino's performance as the hard-pressed coach. As far as I've seen them on TV, football coaches vary widely in type and temperament: still, Pacino never convinces as a man who has spent his life with athletes. In this film he is once again the frantic TV producer of *The Insider*.

But then there's the other side of the schism in the film: *Any Given Sunday* is dazzlingly made. Again Stone displays his enormous film-making gifts. From the opening huge close-up of a football, we know we are in the hands of a director whose powers will immerse us in the sights and (markedly) the sounds of football as we have never experienced them. Stone creates a sensory experience of football so stinging that it almost compensates for the weariness of the script.

Adieu. Robert Bresson died in Paris on December 18th at the age of 98. He was one of the last survivors of those geniuses who made the first century of film comparable to the first century of Western drama. Excepting Shakespeare, the first hundred years of the drama, in Athens, were the greatest in its history; and the same may turn out to be true of film's first century. Bresson was one of the directors who exalted that century, an artist of a quality that makes such terms as "great" and "pure" seem worn.

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He directed only 13 films in his forty-year career, the last one in 1983. To cite a few titles is almost to tremble again in memory of them: *A Man Escaped*, *Diary of a Country Priest*, *Mouchette*, *L'Argent*. To glimpse the mind and spirit behind his work, look at his *Notes on Cinematography*. (An instance of his counsel to himself when shooting: "Put oneself into a state of intense ignorance and curiosity, and yet see things *in advance*.") Bresson rarely gave interviews, but there is an extraordinary, extensive interview with him in Charles Thomas Samuels's fine collection, *Encountering Directors*. In that interview we meet, like an old friend, the inspiring man we have already met in his films.

As with Yasujiro Ozu, Bresson saw the purpose of film at its most simple and most difficult: to make the invisible visible. ■

The return of Caravaggio.

Brushes With Death

By ANDREW BUTTERFIELD

I.

CARAVAGGIO IS HOT. The Baroque artist is more fashionable today than any time since the early seventeenth century. Maligned and misunderstood for most of the intervening period, he is now praised as one of the greatest old master painters. Monographs and exhibitions pour forth at a prodigious pace: sixteen books and seven shows within the last two years alone, more than for any other artist. Caravaggio is even a figure in popular culture: his life has been retold in two plays, half-a-dozen novels, and a film. *This* is celebrity.

The rise in Caravaggio's reputation represents a major shift in taste. Before 1900 there was relatively little commentary on his work, and much of it was dismissive. The tone of criticism was set within a generation of his death in 1610. In the *seicento*, Caravaggio was often attacked as an unschooled anti-classicist, too deeply enamored of Nature. The Italian theorist Giovanni Pietro Bellori, in 1672, praised the painter's genius but added that "Caravaggio suppressed the dignity of art, everyone did as he pleased, and what followed was contempt for beautiful things, the authority of antiquity and Raphael destroyed." Caravaggio's reception reached a nadir in the eighteenth century. In 1708, Roger de Piles grouped him among the worst old master painters; and Joshua Reynolds, in his *Discourses on Art*, omitted him entirely. In the nineteenth century, Caravaggio's reputation rebounded somewhat from this low, but he was still often condemned as an exponent of bad taste. In 1856, in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin called him an artist "of no rank . . . or of a certain order in the abyss," and said his paintings were memorable chiefly for their "vulgarity, dullness, [and] impiety."

It was not until the early twentieth century that Caravaggio's standing significantly improved. Modernism changed the common understanding of the relation of tradition and talent; and the anti-academic avant-garde offered a new model for understanding the painter. Roger Fry was the first to signal this development. Writing in 1905, he declared that Caravaggio was "the first modern artist; the first . . . to proceed not by evolution but by revolution, the first to rely entirely on his own temperamental attitude and to defy tradition and authority . . . his force and sincerity compel our admiration." Whereas he had been previously attacked as an anti-Raphael, Caravaggio was now praised as a proto-Manet. Moreover, the vivid and dramatic character of his paintings evoked comparison not only with Realism, but with the most modern of all visual arts, photography and cinema. Roger Fry and Roberto Longhi, the great Italian art historian, lauded Caravaggio's style in those terms. In praise of the *Conversion of St. Paul*, Fry remarked that "we see [Caravaggio's] essentially journalistic talent—what an impresario for the cinema."

The appreciation of the painter's work took a great leap forward in 1951, following the monumental exhibition "Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi" that Longhi organized. The show spurred the groundbreaking research of Denis Mahon, Walter Friedlander, and others; and the modern industry of Caravaggio studies was born. It was also at this time that southern Baroque became a field of general interest, for collectors and scholars alike. Articles and books on Bernini, the Carracci, and their contemporaries began to appear in number; and prices for Italian Baroque paintings—the last discount sector of the old master market—shot up like a rocket.

ANDREW BUTTERFIELD is the author of *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio* (Yale) and international director of research at Christie's.

CARAVAGGIO: A LIFE
by Helen Langdon
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 432 pp., $30)

M: THE MAN WHO BECAME CARAVAGGIO
by Peter Robb
(Henry Holt & Co., 560 pp., $32.50)

CARAVAGGIO
by Catherine Puglisi
(Phaidon, 448 pp., $60)

QUOTING CARAVAGGIO: CONTEMPORARY ART, PREPOSTEROUS HISTORY
by Mieke Bal
(University of Chicago Press, 286 pp., $45)

CARAVAGGIO
by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit
(BFI Modern Classics/Indiana University Press, 86 pp., $10.95)

CARAVAGGIO'S SECRETS
by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit
(October Books, MIT Press, 118 pp., $25)

SAINTS AND SINNERS: CARAVAGGIO AND THE BAROQUE IMAGE
edited by Franco Mormando
(McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 250 pp., $40)

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Interest in Caravaggio quickly spilled over to the public. The first novel about the painter appeared in 1968, the second in 1972. In no small measure, his popular appeal lies in the scandal surrounding his biography. By all accounts, Caravaggio was mad, bad, and dangerous to know. He associated with whores and painted pictures of male beauties. Easily enraged, and obsessed with honor, he fought often and brutally. He murdered at least one man, and roughed up many more. He was himself nearly killed several times, and he was badly disfigured in an attack shortly before his death of fever at the age of thirty-eight.

Both the anti-authoritarian character of his paintings and the wild details of his life help to create the image of Caravaggio as a figure of pure sensibility, all emotion and intuition raging in the service of art and self-destruction. Already in 1905, Fry celebrated Caravaggio's "temperamental attitude . . . [its] force and sincerity." Such traits are even more highly prized today. The ideal of the artist as Romantic Rebel has been greatly popularized over the course of the last century; it has expanded from Byron and Rimbaud to include Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Kurt Cobain. According to the popular account of his life, Caravaggio fits this type perfectly: a bad boy in black leather; eros and thanatos conjoined. For his film *Caravaggio*, Derek Jarman even cast a Mick Jagger-look-alike for the role of the young artist. It is a powerful myth, and it threatens to obscure the truth of the painter's life and the painter's art.

Fortunately, in recent decades researchers have uncovered an enormous amount of information about the artist. New paintings have been identified and old problems of dating and connoisseurship have been solved. Dozens of documents about the painter and his associates have been discovered. As a result, we know where Caravaggio drank, hung out, played tennis. We know who his patrons were, and much of what they expected from him. We even know the names and the police records of some of the models who posed for him. From the technique of his paintings to the culture of his patrons, we know more about Caravaggio than we have ever known before. It is a great victory of scholarship, and it presents us with a historical record that has few rivals for vividness and detail.

II.

MICHELANGELO MERISI DA Caravaggio was born in 1571, possibly in Milan. His parents were from the small local town of Caravaggio, and his father was major domo and architect for a branch of the Sforza family, the rulers of Milan. At the age of thirteen, the boy was apprenticed to the painter Simone Peterzano, a former pupil of Titian. Thus Caravaggio's artistic training was Lombard and Venetian in character, with a strong emphasis on light and color, and on painting directly from the live model in the studio. Moreover, Leonardo da Vinci had lived in Milan at the beginning of the century, and his emphasis on chiaroscuro and sculptural plasticity was still held as an ideal by local artists. (Leonardo's example later proved fundamental for Caravaggio.) No works by Caravaggio survive from his youth, and there is nothing to suggest that he was a prodigy.

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Caravaggio, "The Calling of St. Matthew," 1600

Orphaned, and perhaps already in trouble with the law, Caravaggio abandoned his hometown for Rome in 1592. During his first year in the Eternal City, Caravaggio was desperately poor. He stumbled from one workshop to another, painting for subsistence wages; at one point he lived on nothing but salad. Finally he managed to gain employment in the studio of Cavaliere d' Arpino, whose elegant late Mannerist style was immensely popular with Roman patrons. It was there that Caravaggio painted his first masterpieces, *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* and *Sick Bacchus*. Conceivably made for sale on the open market, these pictures display a genius for alluring and provocative characterization; and their seemingly direct, even aggressive naturalism was new in the elevated context of Roman art.

After eight months or so in d'Arpino's studio, Caravaggio decided to strike out on his own. His talent had won notice, and he soon found a dealer named Constantino Spata. Spata happened to live on the Piazza San Luigi dei Francesi, and so did Cardinal Francesco Del Monte, one of the most discerning connoisseurs in the city. Del Monte was always looking for fresh talent. Through Spata he purchased the *Gypsy Fortune Teller* (Capitoline version) and the *Cardsharps*, and he invited Caravaggio to live in his palazzo. This was a turning point of the artist's life. During the next eleven years, Caravaggio worked chiefly for Del Monte and his friends, a small circle of elite patrons at the top of Roman society.

Del Monte was the ideal Renaissance patron. Titian and Aretino were among the witnesses at his baptism; he had been schooled in Urbino, the humanist court celebrated by Castiglione; and the great poet Tasso was one of his classmates there. Del Monte was especially learned about painting, eventually collecting 599 pictures; also he owned an important group of antiquities, including the Portland Vase. The cardinal was the dedicatee of the first edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, a handbook of visual symbolism, and he was one of the protectors of the Academia di San Luca, the artists' association in Rome. In politics, Del Monte was one of the most powerful men in Rome and an important ally of the Grand Duke of Florence. In religion, he was deeply sympathetic to the Oratorian movement, founded by the great reformer Filippo Neri. Del Monte was also famous

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as a connoisseur of music.

Initially Caravaggio only made pictures for private display. Some of these are secular, such as the *Concert of Youths*, the two versions of the *Luteplayer*, and the *Bacchus*, whereas others are religious, most notably the *Stigmata of St. Francis* and the *Penitent Magdalene*. The secular pictures are poetic in subject matter and Giorgionesque in style; they are imaginative reworkings of themes from Lombard painting. The sacred paintings, on the other hand, are more radical. These are the pictures that most clearly indicate Caravaggio's genius. The Magdalene, with her head down and her eyes closed, powerfully conveys the intensity of her prayer and remorse. St. Francis, dead to the world, his eyes flickering with spiritual ecstasy, pulls us in empathetically until we can imagine the force of his seraphic vision. Both Alberti and Leonardo had said that the goal of painting was to depict "the passions of the mind." Almost no painter before Caravaggio had represented the interior life of the spirit with such grace and subtle verisimilitude.

WORKING FOR PRIVATE patrons Caravaggio gained a reputation, but not renown. Artists were judged primarily on their interpretations of religious or mythological subjects, made for public or semi-public display, and Caravaggio had yet to make pictures of that kind. This changed in 1599. Del Monte arranged for the artist to receive the commission for the altarpiece and the mural paintings of the Contarelli chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi, the church next door to the cardinal's palace. Caravaggio had never worked on a monumental scale before, and the project initially proved difficult. His first two attempts to depict the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* for the right wall of the chapel ended in failure. Frustrated, he temporarily abandoned this canvas and turned to the picture for the other wall, the *Calling of St. Matthew*. There everything came together, and Caravaggio created one of the most original paintings in the history of Italian art.

He represented the narrative taking place in what appears to be a contemporary setting, a street-corner or a tavern in Rome; and he portrayed St. Matthew and the other publicans in the costume of *bravi*, the young male louts of the city. Thus the *Calling of St. Matthew* looks like it is happening in the present, right before our eyes. Artists had often mixed the historical and the contemporary in images of the past, but never with such shocking power. The chiaroscuro of the picture was also extraordinary. The figures are picked out by strong, warm light, and they are painted in rich, deeply saturated colors; but nearly everything else is in shadow, so that much of the canvas is either brown or black.

Some earlier Lombard and Venetian artists had made tenebristic paintings, but rarely on a monumental scale, and never in Rome, where the lighter palette of late mannerism was still the norm. It was a revolutionary departure. And having found his way with the *Calling of St. Matthew*, Caravaggio readily finished the canvas of the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*. The more complex space and the more tumultuous action of that picture displayed to an even greater degree the dramatic potential of the new idiom. The instant the two paintings were exhibited in 1600, Caravaggio became an international figure. Recognized as the most original and controversial painter in Rome, he was praised, condemned, imitated, and sought after.

Within months of the completion of these pictures, Caravaggio received his second major public commission. The project was to do paintings of the *Conversion of St. Paul* and the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* for the side walls of the Cerasi chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. Caravaggio again had early trouble, and his first paintings for the chapel were rejected. But his second attempt, completed by the fall of 1601, resulted in two of the greatest pictures that he ever created. The simplicity of the *Crucifixion* is radical. Reducing the narrative to its essence,

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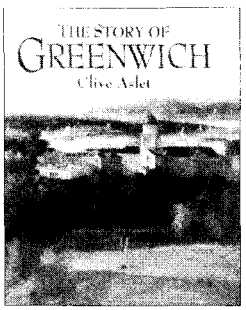

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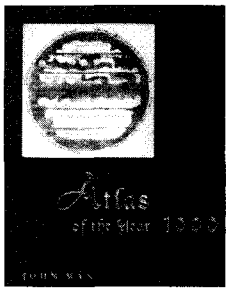

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Caravaggio depicted only St. Peter and three executioners, and he arranged them in a composition that is geometric and classical. The figures are among the most sculptural and three-dimensional in the history of Italian painting. They are part of the heroic tradition that goes back to Giotto, Masaccio, and Michelangelo—and yet at the same time they are the first aggressively plebian figures in Caravaggio's oeuvre—the kneeling executioner, for example, has grime-blackened feet. It is a surprising juxtaposition, intended to make early Christian history intensely vivid and credible.

Even more astonishing is Caravaggio's interpretation of the *Conversion of St. Paul*. In the sixteenth century, paintings of this scene tended to be of operatic grandeur, full of sound and fury; but Caravaggio depicted a moment of stillness. The biblical account (Acts 9: 1-9) is built around contrasts of vision and blindness: Paul can see Christ but he is blind to the world, while his companions can hear Christ but they cannot see Him. Caravaggio was thus inspired to construct his picture out of contrasts of light and dark. Almost no action is shown: just Paul, blind and prostrate, reaching to embrace the light amidst the dark. The Bible stresses that the light flowed (*circumfulsit*) around Paul, and Caravaggio represented Paul's entire body bathed in divine illumination. The light reflects off the flank of the horse as well, adding magically to the impression of profound mystery. As an image of the interior transformation of conversion, Caravaggio's painting is without equal.

OVER THE NEXT several years, Caravaggio worked at the highest pitch of creativity, rapidly producing one major painting after another. For one family alone in little over a year, he made the *Supper at Emmaus* (London version), the *St. John the Baptist* (Capitoline version), and the *Taking of Christ* (Dublin version); and he may have made the *Doubting of St. Thomas* for them as well. (The *Taking of Christ* was the subject of a recent exhibition in Boston and Washington, and the *St. John the Baptist* was the highlight of a show at Hartford and Toronto.) At the same time, the painter began a series of beautiful and deeply moving altarpieces, including the *Death of the Virgin*, the *Entombment of Christ*, and the *Madonna di Loreto*. Other masterpieces from this period are *Amor Vincit Omnia* and the Borghese *St. Jerome*. This was the summit of Caravaggio's career.

In the eyes of his contemporaries, realism was the most striking aspect of Caravaggio's paintings. In praise of the Contarelli pictures, one poet wrote: "Let others simulate, illume, outline / You alone bring us things that are alive and real." Modern viewers often assume that realism and secularism are associated; but exactly the opposite was true. In the Renaissance and the Baroque, it was religion that demanded and propelled artistic verisimilitude. Neither the success nor the scandal of Caravaggio's pictures can be understood without appreciating this fact.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, piety in Italy (and indeed throughout much of Europe) was distinguished by the fervent desire for direct and tangible contact with God. Religious and pastoral texts stress the need for detailed mental contemplation of the holy. A typical passage of pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ* instructs the reader to imagine how it would feel to "kiss . . . the infant Jesus who lies in the manger and beg His mother to offer to let you hold Him a while. Pick Him up and hold Him in your arms. Gaze on His face with devotion and reverently kiss Him and delight in Him . . . Then return Him to the mother and watch her attentively as she cares for Him assiduously and wisely." This book was immensely popular in Counter-Reformation Italy; and many other contemporary manuals, such as the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, also enjoined the believer to imagine sacred history in the most vivid and concrete terms. Similarly, patrons wanted their art works to be as real as possible so that they would achieve maximum spiritual effect. This was certainly true in the circle of Caravaggio's associates. Cardinal Cesare Baronio, the Oratorian leader, once commissioned a sculpture of Christ in the hope "to make those weep who contemplate it attentively . . . for the nearer it draws to nature the more it arouses devotion."

THE BAROQUE WAS the ultimate expression of the connection between realism and religion, and no painter surpassed Caravaggio in this regard. But Caravaggio was thought by many to have gone too far. His pictures were often said to lack all ideality and decorum, and therefore to debase the subjects they depict. It was for this reason that three of his Roman altarpieces were rejected, most notably the *Death of the Virgin*, which was criticized for making the Virgin look like a "dirty prostitute."

The realism of Caravaggio's pictures seemed so emphatic that many of his contemporaries thought of him solely as a naturalist, unschooled and uninterested in the sophisticated language of high art. Bellori wrote that Caravaggio "lacked *invenzione*, decorum, *disegno*, or any knowledge of the science of painting. The moment the model was taken from him, his hand and his mind became empty." These were the common criticisms at the time, but they obscure the genuine complexity of Caravaggio's work. In fact, the painter was deeply receptive to High Renaissance models. The sculptural plasticity of his figures was due, in no small measure, to his study of Michelangelo and the antique; and the gestural language of his pictures such as the *Entombment of Christ* and the *Death of the Virgin*, in which each saint expresses a different shade of grief, would have been inconceivable without the example of Raphael. Much of the magic of Caravaggio's art lies in this tension between the empirical and the ideal.

VAIN AND PRONE to violence, Caravaggio could not handle either success or rejection. The more eminence he achieved as an artist, the more tumultuous his life became. His name appears in the Roman police records with growing frequency, and by 1604 he was in nearly continuous trouble with the law; he was jailed at least three times in that year alone. Many artists in Renaissance and Baroque Italy were temperamental or violent—Bernini hired a thug to deface his mistress, and tried to kill his own brother—but even in the eyes of his contemporaries Caravaggio's behaviour was extreme. One artist recorded that the painter was "always ready to argue or to fight [and] impossible to get along with."

Outside the private sphere of wealthy cardinals, Rome was a tough town, teeming with soldiers, thugs, gypsies, beggars, and prostitutes. Like the artists, many of the soldiers and the prostitutes worked for the cardinalate, and so painters often ran with a rough crowd. The *bravi* and the whores who appear in Caravaggio's pictures are all types that he knew personally. This has been made clearer than ever before by the documents recently published regarding one of his models, Fillide Melandroni, who posed for *St. Catherine of Alexandria* and other paintings.

Fillide was first arrested at the age of thirteen, and she was a prostitute by the age of sixteen. She began posing for Caravaggio at about seventeen. In 1600, she was arrested for attacking another prostitute, whom she found in bed with a man who seems to have been either Fillide's boyfriend or her pimp. According to eyewitness testimony, Fillide exclaimed, *"Ah, poltrona bagascia, qua sei!"* ("Ah, lazy whore, here you are!"). Grabbing a knife from a table, she lunged at the other woman, yelling *"Puttana, de qua et di lá ti voglio sfregiare!"* ("Whore, I am going to cut you all over!"). What makes this story

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especially remarkable is that the fellow in bed with the other woman was Ranuccio Tomassoni, the man whom Caravaggio would later kill. It was a small and violent world.

By 1605, Caravaggio's behavior was increasingly erratic. He rented a cheap apartment with broken-down furniture; but he could not afford even that, and soon he was homeless, dependent on a friend for lodging. Despite his financial troubles, he turned down a job for 6000 scudi, an absolute fortune. Moreover, he was arrested repeatedly—in July for attempting to kill an unarmed man—and in October he was wounded in a brawl. Still, he was fêted by poets and pursued by patrons, and that autumn he received the most prestigious commission of his career: an altarpiece for St. Peter's. But the project ended badly. The painting was rejected by the patrons shortly after installation, and it was subsequently purchased by Cardinal Scipione Borghese.

The end of Caravaggio's Roman period came the following year. Contemporary accounts record that the fateful fight was over a line call in a tennis game, but this is not certain. What is sure is that on the evening of Sunday, May 28, 1606, Caravaggio and some of his tougher friends, including a one-eyed soldier, waited for Ranuccio Tomassoni in the Via della Scrofa. It appears that Tomassoni, too, was looking for a fight, and he soon appeared accompanied by several male relatives, all armed. A battle broke out, and when it was over Tomassoni was dead, having been stabbed in the stomach by Caravaggio.

As a result, the painter received a death warrant and fled the city. Caravaggio stopped first in the Alban hills, where he was shielded by members of the Colonna family. (The Marchesa of Caravaggio's hometown was a Colonna princess, and the family had always taken an interest in the painter.) He made two pictures there, the *Supper at Emmaus* (Brera version) and the *Magdalene in Ecstasy*. They are darker and more haunting than anything that he painted before. Ten years earlier he had depicted the Magdalene in a state of profound peace; now he made her look febrile and ravished.

By October, Caravaggio had moved on to Naples, which was then a part of the Spanish empire. Over the next eight months, he painted, among other works, three large altarpieces: the *Madonna of the Rosary*, the *Flagellation of Christ*, and the *Seven Acts of Mercy*. These are magnificent pictures, distinguished by the grandeur of the figures and the strength of the modelling. The figure of Christ in the *Flagellation* is Herculean in its physiognomy; no doubt Caravaggio used a classical sculpture for his model. The artist's technical facility was now paramount. He painted quickly and thinly, sometimes using the reddish-brown ground as an integral element of the final image. These paintings forever changed the course of Neapolitan art, and they had a large impact on Spanish painting as well.

Despite his success in Naples, Caravaggio was soon on the move. In July 1607, he sailed for Malta. Like every painter of the era, Caravaggio dreamed of becoming a knight (few succeeded), and the Knights of Malta were the most prestigious order in Europe. Caravaggio's entrée was smoothed by his Colonna connections, and within days of arrival he had an interview with Alof de Wignacourt, the head of the Order. The two men struck a deal: Caravaggio would become the court painter and would be made a knight in exchange. For Caravaggio, this meant not only higher social status but also a measure of rehabilitation, and the hope of a pardon. He made Wignacourt's portrait, and he also painted the tragic and sublime *Beheading of St. John*, which he signed in the painted blood flowing from the saint's neck. On July 14, 1608, a year and a day after his arrival, Caravaggio was officially

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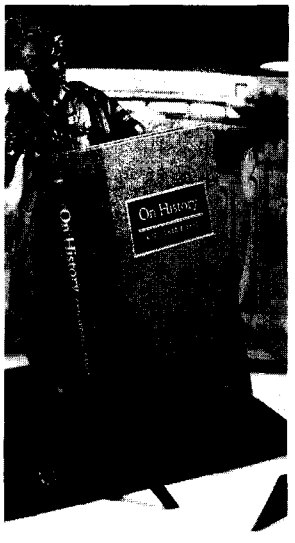
On History and Other Essays

By Michael Oakeshott
Foreword by Timothy Fuller



In five essays, including three on historiography, one of the greatest minds in English political thought in the twentieth century explores themes central to the human experience: the nature of history, the rule of law, and the quest for power that is intrinsic to the human condition. Michael Oakeshott believed, as Timothy Fuller observes, that "the historian's effort to understand the past without ulterior motive [is the] effort which distinguishes the historian as historian from all who examine the past for the guidance they expect it to provide about practical concerns." The essays on history are "Present, Future, and Past," "Historical Events: The fortuitous, the causal, the similar, the correlative, the analogous, and the contingent," and "Historical Change: Identity and continuity." In "The Rule of Law," Oakeshott takes the expression to mean a particular kind of ideal human relationship. In "The Tower of Babel"—in one of two essays he wrote by the same title and on the same subject—Oakeshott discusses the various versions in which the Bible story has been told and the different circumstances which it has been used to illuminate. ***On History*** was originally published in 1983.

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received into the Order.

But then something went wrong. Seventeenth-century biographers report that due to his "natural belligerence" and "tormented nature," he instigated a violent quarrel with other knights, for which he was expelled from the Order and cast into an underground cell. He managed to escape, and sailed to Sicily. The Sicilian nobility was delighted to receive an internationally famous artist and gave him a hero's welcome. By then, however, the painter was truly unbalanced: contemporary accounts uniformly described him as mad or crazy. He was still under a death sentence from Rome, and he feared reprisal from the Knights of Malta. He went everywhere armed, and slept with a dagger at his side. Still, Caravaggio managed to paint a series of beautiful altarpieces, including the spectral *Raising of Lazarus*. As Helen Langdon writes, "His great Sicilian altarpieces isolate their shadowy, pitifully poor figures in vast areas of darkness; they suggest the desperate fears and frailty of man, and at the same time convey, with a new yet desolate tenderness, the beauty of humility and of the meek, who shall inherit the earth."

Men condemned for capital crimes were sometimes pardoned after three years, and Caravaggio's powerful friends, including the pope's nephew Scipione Borghese, were working on his behalf. Anticipating pardon, and attempting to flee his pursuers, the painter sailed from Sicily for Naples, arriving in the summer of 1609. In October, he was attacked by four men in the Osteria del Cerriglio, the most famous tavern in Naples. It is not certain whether this was a random act of violence or a planned act of assassination. Caravaggio survived, but his face was so badly scarred that he was said to be unrecognizable.

THE PAINTINGS THAT he made after his recovery are the blackest of his career. The figures are isolated and lost in shadow. Caravaggio included his own image in two of these pictures and they are among the most disturbing self-portraits ever made. He appears in the background of the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula*, looking like a personification of mental anguish, drowning in despair, as wretched as the animal in Goya's *Dog Sinking in Quicksand*. Caravaggio's other late self-portrait is as the severed head of Goliath, held out in David's hand.

The story of David and Goliath was traditionally understood as an allegory of Good against Evil, Christ against Satan. Caravaggio certainly meant something of that sort here; David's sword bears the inscription "H O S," short for *Humilitas occidit superbiam*, or humility slays pride—a quotation from Augustine about David. Caravaggio thus identifies himself as the figure of Satanic pride and rebellion, justly destroyed. Images of David victorious were uniformly celebratory and triumphal. Yet Caravaggio's picture is all sorrow and remorse. "My heart is in anguish within me," one of David's psalms confesses. "The terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling are come upon me and horror overwhelms me." This is the mood of the picture.

The end was near. In July 1610, assured of a pardon, Caravaggio sailed for Rome. He disembarked at Palo, a fortress south of the mouth of the Tiber; he was briefly imprisoned there, but it is not certain whether this was a condition of his pardon or a case of mistaken identity. The boat sailed on, taking all of Caravaggio's property, including the pictures he intended as gifts for Scipione Borghese and his other benefactors. Upon his release, Caravaggio was desperate to catch up with the boat, and he made the difficulty journey across land to its next stop, Porto Ercole; but the boat had already gone. There Caravaggio succumbed to fever, probably contracted during his trek. He died a few days later, alone and penniless, the most famous painter in the world.

III.

TWENTY-THREE BOOKS and exhibition catalogues about Caravaggio have appeared in the last two years, and they are aimed at every sector of the book-buying public, from the mass market to the intellectual elite. In their range and their diversity, they provide not only a portrait of the artist, but also a snapshot of the state of art history at the end of the century. It is an image in high contrast: the books tend to be extremely good or extremely bad, with little in between.

Without question, pride of place on the English-language shelf belongs to Helen Langdon. Of all the recent books, only *Caravaggio: A Life* deserves to be counted in the company of the great Caravaggio biographies by Walter Friedlander (1955) and Howard Hibbard (1983). While Langdon's work does not replace these earlier monographs, it is now the single best book on its subject in English. She skillfully synthesizes the archival research conducted by Italian scholars during the last twenty years, and she combines their findings with her own smart and sensitive interpretation of the artist and his historical context.

Her analysis is unfailingly rich with references to Renaissance and Baroque literature and culture. To explain the emotional power of Caravaggio's chiaroscuro, for example, Langdon effectively quotes a range of Baroque writers, Campanella, Webster, and Loyola among them. She suggests that "the brooding and tragic darkness" of Caravaggio's pictures "conveys the terror of broken humanity at man's alienation from God. His [Caravaggio's] earthbound figures are travellers or pilgrims, mired in the prison of this world, and unconsoled by any vision of Paradise. Only the light suggests the soul and the grace without which man cannot attain union with God." This is beautifully stated, and it is right.

LANGDON IS ALSO very good in analyzing the combination of the heroic and the humble in Caravaggio's style. "In a sense," she observes, "Caravaggio, like Filippo Neri, is creating a shock of humility, pushing the world of the poor before an elite audience and using a language that seems rough and vernacular and available to everyone. Yet his figures are also grand, and his massive, sculptural style conveys the power of a primitive, heroic era." The chapters on the artist in Rome are especially noteworthy for their lively and detailed account of the social, intellectual, and religious life of the city.

Langdon sees Baroque Rome as a city of vivid extremes—wealth and poverty, violence and piety, refinement and rioting; and she suggests that the contrasts in Caravaggio's art and life can be properly understood only against this background. Repeatedly, she evokes the lights and darks of the city through a series of contradictions and comparisons. Thus she combines an account of the brutal execution of Beatrice Cenci in September 1599 with an account of the rediscovery of Santa Cecelia's body one month later; and she argues that Caravaggio's *Judith and Holofernes* must be examined in relation to these stories of violence and martyrdom. To explicate the style of Caravaggio's Roman pictures, she emphasizes both the princely wealth of his patrons and their fervent support for the ideals of poverty and charity as embodied in the Oratorian movement.

Langdon is particularly superb on the topography of Baroque Rome. The deployment of detail is masterful: Langdon seems to know where every figure lived, where every event took place. Remarkable, too, is the cornucopia of information that she produces on Caravaggio's friends and associates. About Rannuccio Tommasoni, she informs us that his father had participated in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris; that the Tommasoni had a long history of service to the Farnese, and named its children after Farnese princes; that Ranuccio was named after the boy in the beautiful portrait by Titian

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now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington; that the Tommasoni, as Farnese henchmen, were largely free to break the law, and therefore frequently brawled and fought with the police; that Ranuccio acted as a protector of prostitutes; and so on. All this is a far cry from the simple and inaccurate description of Ranuccio as a "young well-bred man from Terni" that one finds in almost all earlier books on Caravaggio. This amassing of detail is not pedantry; its effect is to give the figures in Caravaggio's circle the breath of life.

It is a remarkable achievement; and so, too, in a different way, is Peter Robb's *M*. Robb's goal is to write a popular biography that has the narrative propulsion of a novel. He is very learned about Caravaggio, but he has chosen (as he states in the forward) to favor "romancing" over "discussions of the evidence." He notes that "the scrupulous may . . . find here that likelihood hardens too quickly into certainty." Indeed, the problem is that if you do not already know a lot about Caravaggio, you cannot be sure which of Robb's statements are based on fact, and which on inference or invention. (This is especially troubling since Robb has been misled by the wild errors contained in Bassani and Bellini's *Caravaggio Assassino*, the notorious monograph based on falsified documents, which appeared in 1994.) But Robb's book is not really meant to be a work of history. It is an attempt at imaginative revivification.

This is made clear by Robb's eccentric prose style. In an effort to make the past come alive, Robb writes in a mix of the demotic and the poetic. At times it is highly effective, as in his slow and cinematic ekphrasis of *The Calling of St. Matthew*. An excerpt will give a sense of his style:

> A bunch of men were sitting at a table. There were five of them and their ages spread over forty years or so. Three were flash types, a couple of them with feathers in their hats and one of them wearing a sword too. A third stared hatless at a puddle of coins on the table. A rather older man with a beard and a floppy hat was counting the coins and a more elderly clerkly man on his feet peered over the shoulders of the two nearest the money, adjusting the glasses on his nose. There was a bag of coins, an inkwell and a pen and an open ledger on the table. The activity was routine, mundane. Vaguely lowlife, the young *bravi* looked faintly bored. Was the money the takings of a shop or winnings from cards, a payment to be divvied up or the fruit of a theft?
>
> Two strangers walked in, one of them a robust greyhaired barefoot man with a beard, holding a stick and with a coarse blanket wrapped around him, looking like one of the country pilgrims already flooding Rome that year—and very unlike the young city blood sitting nearest the door, in billowing silk sleeves with velvet stripes, plume, silk tights and soft shoes. The newcomer was leaning toward the nearest young guy, the one straddling the bench, wearing a sword and looking edgy, saying something in a low voice and raising his hand in reassurance. Behind the greyhaired arrival and largely obscured by him was a taller and younger and strikingly good looking man with a light beard. He too seemed to be barefoot, but all you could really see of him were his neck and face behind his companion's shoulder, and his outstretched arm and hand. He was looking over the heads of the younger ones, gesturing effortlessly to the bearded man in the middle of the group, the one counting the money. The bearded man had seen the newcomer but didn't seem to know him, unsure whether he was the one they were looking for and why they'd want him. He pointed at himself in a way that said *You speaking to me?* The ripple of disturbance hadn't yet reached the end of the table. The others just went on counting the money.

At times, however, Robb's style is merely crude and shocking. Translating a line from the Bible, Robb has Jesus say to Paul that "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." And one chapter begins:

> Summer time was fun time and nobody was more aware of this than the younger members of the college of cardinals. The wealthier and social minded set. In 1601 M was being found more and more often in their retinues—street fighting at night wasn't the only relief from the mental drama of the Cerasi canvases. . . . Not everyone was a cardinal at the seafood barbecue but nobody brought his wife. Nobody ever did. These were male occasions and the only women ever present were *honest courtesans*, who were strictly professional girls, ones who had enough class and cultivation to grace high society as well as satisfy the guests.

Clichés do not improve with irony.

Robb also gives the paintings new titles of his own devising, such as *Mary Dead*, *Fruit & Veg*, and *Sick Self-Portrait*. The result is that *M* is a very colorful and dramatic book, a mix between a standard biography and a Beat potboiler. Irving Stone wrote *The Agony and the Ecstasy* at the same time that Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg were publishing their first books; and it is as if these two different visions of artistic life—so far apart forty years ago—had now been joined in *M*. It is no wonder, of course, that this should happen in a life of Caravaggio, and not another Renaissance or Baroque painter.

Catherine Puglisi's monograph is a solid and straightforward account of the artist. Puglisi avoids the extravagances of Robb but lacks the depth and the originality of Langdon: the text seems aimed primarily at students. In its illustrations, certainly, Puglisi's book outshines the others. There are over 200 color plates in the volume, many of details and comparative material. For some readers this will make Caravaggio's art more accessible and intelligible than any explanation can. To see Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ* alongside Peterzano's painting of the same subject is to understand both Caravaggio's originality and his dependence on tradition. Unfortunately, Puglisi's unpretentious text has been packaged in an aggressively stylish format; the type is small and pale gray and difficult to read, and the plates of Caravaggio's works are framed with silver surrounds that are more reflective than the illustrations themselves. The gray and silver colors of the book clash with the dark earth tones of Caravaggio's palette: the result is so jolting that it must have been intentional. Was the designer's idea that the "radical" Caravaggio requires a radical and postmodern presentation?

It is in Mieke Bal's volume that postmodernism is fully loosed upon Caravaggio. Bal sees a resurgence of the Baroque in cutting-edge contemporary art; she identifies a group of young artists, most notably Andres Serrano, as the "Caravaggisti of today." Their "quoting Caravaggio," she argues, changes forever our understanding of the poor quotee. According to Bal, "the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead." Bal chooses to interpret Caravaggio not only in light of contemporary art, but as if he were an artist living today: "My pursuit in this book . . . aims at establishing a coevalness between the contemporary subject exemplified by the artists I am discussing, and the historical subject, in this case Caravaggio's paintings, through the notion of a shared time, defined by concerns that are both of today and of then."

Bal's premise is overstated and unconvincing. Quotation and imitation have been common features throughout twentieth-century art (and throughout Renais-

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sance and Baroque art, for that matter); and they have not had the impact on the originals that she claims. Picasso painted no less than 58 versions of Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, but they do not "obliterate" the original. If one wishes, one can regard *Las Meninas* with Picasso's versions in mind; but one can look just as easily at the original without thinking about them. The most famous copy in modern art is *L.H.O.O.Q.*, Duchamp's version of the *Mona Lisa*, yet Duchamp's picture hardly alters our understanding of the original; if anything, it affirms the *Mona Lisa*'s inviolability.

Bal offers a series of meta-historical interpretations of Caravaggio's pictures, but her readings are subjective and even counterfactual. In a typical passage, she writes:

> Caravaggio's *The Cardsharps* . . . and his *Fortune-Teller* have always seemed to me utterly contemporary . . . For me, *The Cardsharps* is a visual narrative about vision, time, and identity formation; about beauty and desire. The cards evoke Narcissus' mirror, and the youth looking into the cards is accordingly totally self-absorbed. To get a better sense of the visual narrative, I suggest we resist the temptation to read the prefabricated narrative of card-playing and cheating into the visual image. If we read the image as a surface, foregrounding its visuality at the expense of the realism of perspective, the older man's look, distorted by desire, can be seen as being directed at the beautiful youth's face. The other youth, coarser than this Narcissus, looks intently at the beautiful youth's face, perhaps in astonishment; let's make him the stand-in for the viewer.

"To me . . . for me . . . I . . . we . . . let's": this is the language of hermeneutical self-indulgence. Bal dismisses Caravaggio's narrative as "prefabricated," and she advances another narrative of her own invention at its expense. Her version requires an extreme misreading of the picture. She changes the spatial relationship of the figures so that the man in the background can see the youth's face; she alters the man's expression so that his theatrical grimace can become a look of lust; and she transforms the unidentified youth into Narcissus. Here, anything goes. Bal seems to lack entirely the capacity for self-criticism. Any thought that occurs to her, no matter how superficial or implausible, strikes her as interesting and true. Perhaps we should be grateful, since Bal unwittingly and usefully demonstrates that deconstruction has devolved into vanity.

The Rain

gliding in slowly, at a
human height, then swooping up
grazing the Homestead before falling
back to meet me here
in the other life of newt & worm,
stream & seizure, sometimes
barely holding it together
when something in the rain slips
past into the mind & it responds
with events before they've happened,
then reversing into panic,
continuing backwards into
knee-high hills where it shoots
into forward & goes crashing
through the windshield laughing
at a child accumulating itself
only to turn into a life of
furnished rooms & gas-fires,
foreign cities, losses, age.
But one day something stands up
out of the storm & I can trace
her shape & follow her as though
she was an old friend before
she split like an echo. Now,
after the rains, in the rich
loamy scent of a female world,
one I'd known as a child,
I listen again for what might be
hidden on the other side,
like silence carved from noise,
or the richness inside rock.

Brian Swann

LEO BERSANI AND Ulysse Dutoit have written two books on Caravaggio. One focuses on the paintings, while the other concentrates on Derek Jarman's film about the painter; and inevitably the books address many of the same themes. Bersani and Dutoit trace "an interpretive itinerary" in Caravaggio's work from his early paintings of "erotic" youths to his later images of decapitation. They argue that the early pictures establish an ironic slippage between model and role, and that this engages the viewer in a hermeneutic game of solicitation and retreat: now you see it, now you don't.

In such a reading, Caravaggio's paintings are essentially enigmatic. Concealing more than they show, the paintings are an extended meditation on the impossibility of knowledge. In his later works, according to Bersani and Dutoit, Caravaggio pursues the enigma of the "traumatic signifier" to its ultimate expression: he disappears into his art. His portrait as the head of Goliath is the emblem of this self-immolation. But decapitation is not, in this account, only a form of loss. It is also a means of liberation from the illusion of knowledge:

> Without *our* heads, we would not be speculating about what the heads in Caravaggio's painting may "mean," and one way to make us lose our heads—to ruin any confidence we might have about "knowing" him, or as we shall see, about the very possibility of knowledge—is for Caravaggio to decapitate himself, to thrust toward us. . . a bodyless head that can no longer say or mean anything, that can no longer be read. Caravaggio finally adopts that extreme solution to what he seems to have anticipated as centuries of interpretive promiscuity *in front of his work* . . .

Bersani and Dutoit are attempting to describe the actual intentions of the historical person who lived and worked four centuries ago, but they know painfully little about Caravaggio and the culture of Baroque Rome; and they routinely ignore questions such as a work's function, physical setting, ritual context, literal and symbolic meanings and so on. Moreover, they seem to believe that Caravaggio, too, did not care about such issues. Without our heads, indeed.

The artist whom Bersani and Dutoit present is anxious to undercut the symbolic and mimetic foundation of his paintings so that he can move on to the "higher" plane of philosophic speculation. Thus they declare that Carravaggio wanted "to prevent us from reading the work as history." They assert that the artist's goal was to free his figures from narrative or historical representation so that they could become "ontological cartographers . . . mapping modes of being." In their view, Caravaggio was not primarily concerned with pictorial composition or personal salvation; he was interested in problems such as "the anal mode of spatiality" and "the unmappable extensibility of being." Bersani and Dutoit's visual observations about pictures are also vague and hypothetical. They state that in the *Supper at Emmaus* Caravaggio "reveals to his spectators a certain equalizing of value among objects"; that "*The Conversion of St. Paul* represents the unavoidable connectedness of forms in space"; that "the compatibility of death with sensuality is the subject of . . . the Vatican *Entombment*." The pre-Socratic

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philosopher Xenophanes observed that if animals could draw, "horses would depict the gods shaped like horses, and cattle like cattle, making the bodies of the gods resemble their own;" and in the same way, Bersani and Dutoit can only imagine Caravaggio as a post-structuralist professor.

The distinctive strength of Caravaggio's style elicits imitation. In the early seventeenth century, dozens of painters emulated the tenebrism and the figure types of his paintings. While a few succeeded in making an original contribution on this basis—Georges de la Tour, most notably—many fell far short. In the hands of most Caravaggisti, the artist's means for uncovering the emotional truth of a narrative became little more than a manner of acute stylization. Today, some of Caravaggio's interpreters also feel the urge to emulate the painter. Robb's mix of high and low, Bal's mix of past and present, the overwrought design of Puglisi's book: all seem to have been conceived as analogs for features of his work. This goes hand in hand with the notion that he is one of us. In a draft of his film script, Jarman wrote that "only by making Caravaggio a contemporary will we see how revolutionary a painter he was." Unfortunately, it is an impulse that transforms Caravaggio into a modern shadow, and it leaves the reader in the dark. The historical Caravaggio, the one unearthed by scholars and archivists, and illumined by Langdon and others, remains the more vital and the more powerful figure. ■

Heartland of Darkness

By JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall by Misty Bernall

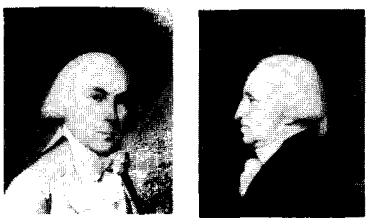
(Plough Publishing House, 160 pp., $17)

I.

MARTYRDOM HAS NEVER been pretty. Bodies flayed, burned, impaled, dismembered, thrown to wild beasts and dank pits, starved, tossed over cliffs, violated before death: it is a vision of hell, but a promise of heaven. In the Christian tradition, indeed, martyrdom was the ground on which the early church arose. So many suffered so horribly because they refused to deny the name by which they were claimed; because they would not recant their view of the world even to spare their own lives. This suffering became, for believers, a proof of truth. Needless to say, it did not relieve philosophers and theologians of the duty to analyze belief strenuously; but the magnitude of this courage in the face of imminent torture and death could not be scanted, and it offered extraordinary testimony to the power of faith in the potent evidence of a bodily act. ("Martyr" derives from *martyria* and means "witness.") The early accounts of martyrdom were called the "acts of the martyrs": not their wishes or their thoughts or their prayers, but what they actually did. That was what counted.

The veneration of martyrs, and the cults of the saints that grew up around their deeds and legends, presented both an opportunity and a challenge for the early church: an opportunity, because the powerful witness of the martyrs stunned observers and alerted them to the power of this professed faith; and a challenge, because the cults (from the Latin *colere*, to honor) could sometimes edge uncomfortably close to pagan practices of homage and sacrifice to noble persons who made claims to quasi-divine or other liminal status. For Christians, none was to be worshipped save the triune God; and so the veneration of martyrs and saints had to be distinguished carefully from a heretical worship of mere mortals, no matter how self-sacrificing and noble.

The reverence took shape in rituals of public veneration, tribute, pilgrimage, and patronage, as wonderfully detailed in Peter Brown's *The Cult of the Saints*. Official veneration of saints in the public worship of the church was permitted only after an ecclesiastical inquiry into the truth of the amazing stories. (Sometimes the hand of the church was forced, as a particular martyr's *cultus* might have grown so strong in a region or locale that to deny official sanction to entrenched



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forms of local veneration could be costly to the faith.) Martyrs were believers who had suffered in a particular way. They were persons who had been presented with a choice: renounce your faith or die. In certain instances, the lives of others were also threatened, which added a great burden of ethical complexity to the ordeal.

Martyrdom is a matter of fidelity "even to the point of a voluntary acceptance of death," in the words of Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor*. The martyr's calling is to affirm both human dignity and the "inviolability of the moral order" in a negative sense: there are things that one must *not* allow oneself to be compelled to do. Martyrdom is a highly dramatic (and often melodramatic) enactment of the distinction between good and evil. It is the contrast between the martyr's witness to the truth of his or her faith and the tormenter's demand that the martyr assent to what he or she denies that startles and affirms: contradiction is lived most extremely when it has become literally lethal.

AND YET THERE is something terrifying, and spiritually troubling, about the enthusiasm for martyrdom. Surely martyrdom, if it comes, should arrive as a terrible exigency. Christian martyrology always had its dangerous side, which Augustine, among others, sought to quell. The enthusiasm derived from a misplaced notion of the meaning of grace, even spiritual perfection. Some among the early Christians—and this view was still in existence in the fourth century, when Augustine sought to refute it—held that as soon as one made full confession of sins and was baptized (adult baptism being more common as adults came over to the new religion), it would not be at all a bad idea to find a way to shuffle off this mortal coil: then one could die in a state of perfection and go straight to one's heavenly home. But Augustine cautioned that confession and baptism do not create a blank slate, an empty ideal of innocence and ignorance; that the important thing is to endure in the full knowledge that perfection would forever elude the sinner, and that there would always be moments of doubt, skepticism, and despair. Besides, Christians were called to life in community. Martyrdom might come one's way, but one must not seek it out. Such a quest for death denotes an excess of spiritual pride.

Antique notions of honor also got tangled up with the new Christian dispensation, and one can see both influences at work in such early accounts of martyrdom as the extraordinary document that has come down to us as the *Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*. Perpetua herself wrote the early chapters of the story, which was completed by others following her violent death. Perpetua was a Christian catechumen of a high-born family. Felicitas was a slave who was eight months pregnant. Perpetua was suckling an infant son when she was arrested; and both were given ample opportunity to save their lives by recanting their Christianity. Perpetua recounts the pleadings of her desperate father who, when his version of family honor failed to move her, appealed on behalf of her infant son, who would likely die if ripped from his mother's breast. But Perpetua was almost frighteningly stalwart: she would be called by none but her correct name: "I am a Christian." She understood that her father spoke in the name of a true love, and she, too, feared for her child; but she would not betray her new faith. Neither could the lowborn Felicitas, who gives birth to her child, a child given over to a "sister" (a fellow Christian) to raise as Felicitas goes into the arena with the physical signs of recent childbirth evident to the howling crowd. Perpetua and Felicitas were warriors who turned Roman notions of gladiatorial combat on its head—young women facing death as bravely as any gladiator trained for the task. The document concludes with an account of Perpetua's death. A quivering young soldier is assigned the task of the *coup de grâce*, since the animals had not finished the poor woman off. When his first thrust to her neck hits bone, Perpetua "herself guided to her throat the wavering hand of the young, untried gladiator. Perhaps so great a woman, who was feared by the unclean spirit, could not otherwise be slain except she willed." This is tough stuff. Especially for us late moderns, it is hard to take. It is so shockingly, uncompromisingly extreme. We are so accustomed to the complexities of intentionality and the calculus of consequentialism that the finality of the martyr's act may seem almost unintelligible: must they really have taken it that far? The discomfiting answer, in the circumstances, was yes: in the context of persecution, and in the understanding of faith, there was no acceptable alternative except the radical one.

MARTYRDOM HAS FADED from its preeminence in the stories that contemporary Christians in America tell one another about their faith, in part because such horrors and such glories have not been a part of the American experience, and in part because a certain kind of Protestant pietism prefers the proof of feelings to the proof of actions. That children were once reared on the acts of the martyrs, with all their gruesome iconography, would probably be construed nowadays as a form of child abuse. It seems much more convenient to push these tests of faith backward into the mists of time, and to confine the martyrs to the lore of the early church, or churches at various points of persecution. Can the modern utilitarian mind comprehend a conviction that is expressed in death? Can a death really be exemplary? We call the victims of totalitarianism "martyrs," but we do so almost metaphorically. Certainly we fear their example as much as we admire it; and it is so far away from our own experience that we can almost not understand it. (One might even make the case that it is a Christian shame that there were not more martyrs who chose death over making their peace with Nazism or communism.)

We are also likely to be troubled by the tender age of many of the historical martyrs. Joan of Arc was only nineteen when she was burned at the stake. Eulalia, described as "the most celebrated virgin martyr of Spain," was twelve; she had refused to show honor to the gods during Maximian's persecution, and for that refusal she was tortured and burnt. Saint Agnes is described as "little more than a child": she violated the conventions of well-born young Roman women by refusing marriage and then by offering herself for martyrdom during a persecution in the fourth century. Her age is usually given as twelve.

Maria Goretti, who was canonized in 1950, also met her sacred death at the age of twelve. The year was 1902, and the occasion was her resistance of a rape. What impressed believers, and led to her eventual canonization, was not only the religious grounds of her resistance, but the fact that her murderer, haunted by her courage, lived to repent and, upon his release from prison after twenty-seven years, took communion with Maria Goretti's mother.

Our liberal dispensation—and I certainly do not mean to make light of it—has great difficulty with such examples. We have conferred an almost magical status on "the age of consent." Life and death decisions, at twelve? Surely these harrowing things are more fit, we think, for psychologists than for theologians. Yet it is important to remember that twelve-year-olds were much older in the fourth century than they are today, with our culturally sanctioned perpetuation of an increasingly prolonged adolescence or pre-adulthood. But that may be too comforting. More difficult is facing the terrible fact that life and death decisions were forced on these youngsters. Anyway, we are not altogether lacking in recent examples of young people putting them-

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selves in harm's way for the sake of a cause. Consider the Birmingham Children's March organized by Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Many consider it a turning point in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. The image of school children being arrested by the thousands, hosed and attacked by dogs, is replayed each and every time the civil rights story is told. King knew that the children would be in harm's way. He was also convinced that young children were capable of understanding self-endangering behavior. Historians of the movement, like journalists at the time, saw no reason to gainsay the clarity and the determination of the black children of Birmingham to participate in the struggle for the liberation of their people.

Was King wrong? Taylor Branch reports that there was dissent within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference about King's strategy, with many voices raised in opposition to the endangerment of the children. But King clearly understood the power of the witness of the deed, and he believed that the cause was sacred, and he went forward. He was convinced that spiritual age is not chronological age, and that great deeds could be done prior to the "age of consent." And the great deeds that were done suggest the power of early formation and the strength of formative moral influences in the hearts, the minds, and even the bodies of the young. My own view is that, as a general rule, children should not be put on the frontlines of battle—we walked with our children in a silent, small vigil against the war in Vietnam on the common of a peaceful New England town, and I would never have considered hauling them off to a huge rally that included within its ranks protestors seeking a confrontation with the police. But then our children were not black children living under segregation.

II.

THIS BRINGS US to what her mother calls the "unlikely martyrdom of Cassie Bernall," the young woman who answered "yes," with a gun muzzle to her head, when asked tauntingly by one of the two killers in Columbine High School, her peer in years: "Do you believe in God?" Probably no one will ever know for sure how to reconstruct the horror of that massacre. A number of eyewitnesses (or ear-witnesses, as they were cowering in terror beneath desks) describe the killer laughing and chortling "Why?" to Cassie's profession of belief, before blowing a hole in her head. Other accounts lengthen the exchange, with Cassie saying not only "yes" but telling her killer that he, too, should follow God's path.

Whatever the exact words, there seems little doubt that Cassie was challenged and that she refused to deny her faith. No, that's not quite right. There is some doubt in some recent journalistic reports about what exactly happened and who said exactly what. I happen to believe that the doomed young woman did say "yes"; but what is more interesting, I think, is the reaction from various quarters to the prospect of any kind of martyr in our midst. The United States, again, is a country that has not seen systematic religious persecution with a high body count. It has been dominated by forms of Protestantism that, at least by the turn of the century, frequently took pride in its "reasonableness" when compared with Catholicism or Anabaptists or other extremists. Such a polity will not kindle to the phenomenon of martyrdom.

But what about Cassie Bernall? Is the mantle of martyr, now claimed on behalf of a sixteen-year-old girl in Colorado, warranted in light of the long history of Christian martyrdom? Misty Bernall, the author of this short and unpretentious and often affecting account of her daughter's life and death, has her own reservations. In a television interview for a religious network, she remarked that her daughter would not have wanted to be described as a martyr, adding: "I think of martyrs as in Biblical times. She was just my Cassie."

And yet in her book Misty Bernall recalls the meaning of martyr—"witness"—and says that her daughter was most certainly a witness who "refuses in the face of terror and torture, to deny his or her faith." But even if her daughter's death fits this traditional definition, her martyrdom was nonetheless "unlikely." Why? Because "she was just a teen. I'm not belittling her bravery. I'm profoundly proud of her for refusing to cave in, and for saying yes to her killers, and I always will be. Still, she would hate to be held up as a shining example or singled out for praise." Misty Bernall concludes that to promote her daughter as a martyr is "unnecessary." She simply "stood up for what she believed," which seems entirely appropriate.

But the legend of Cassie Bernall will not be determined by Misty Bernall. Nor will the mother be able to put a stop to the political exploitation of her daughter's legend. Some, for political purposes, quickly seized on this "martyrdom," as if her moment of courage—assuming the accuracy of the account—could somehow spur a new Great Awakening and help all of us, but especially the young, to move out

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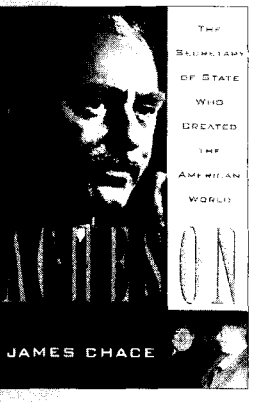

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of the backwash of so much of what passes as "teen culture" and into a new, spiritual, and conservative enlightenment.

This politicization of the murder is not only crass; it is also a little beside the point. It proposes to batten on what may no longer exist: namely, a culture capable of sustaining and building upon rare and often stunningly brief moments, and giving them staying power over the long haul. The early martyrs were taken up, over the span of centuries, and made part of a highly complicated intellectual and institutional framework. Such traditions require above all a capacity that we lack: attention over time. But nothing durable will come from all the pink-tinged websites.

One of the hundreds of sites in homage to Cassie Bernall calls upon young people to take "The Cassie Pledge." The pledge promises to fight hatred with love; to show compassion; to search out those who are angry, hurt, and forgotten and to assure them that they are loved; to be a living witness; and so on. The problem is not the words, it is the entropic reality in which the words are said—their detethering from authoritative cultural forms that can fix them so that they survive meaningfully beyond the founding moment. The "Cassie Pledge," as with so much of the Cassie material on the Internet, purports to express a spirituality that will last a lifetime. But last, how? Absent the sustaining forms of spiritual discipline, of *any* discipline, Cassie Bernall's death has become just the latest splash in the stream of American spiritual self-help.

Interestingly enough, Cassie herself seemed to be moving toward a recognition of the need for a tough-minded spiritual life—for a set of practices. She had been reading and re-reading Henri Nouwen's *Bread for the Journey*; her mother reports that it had become one of her favorite texts. But it had taken her a number of hard years to alter her direction and go from being a dabbler in Satanism, vampirism, goth culture, self-mutilation, and teen darkness generally, to being a reader of Shakespeare, Dickens, and Dickinson. Misty Bernall's book reads not as the story of a martyred child, but as the story of tested parents. It is a kind of nightmare ethnography of adolescent nihilism and its corollary, parental fear.

III.

MISTY BERNALL'S BOOK is noteworthy because she refuses to reduce her daughter's fate into an easy lesson, into the formulaic triumph of "tough love" or some other nostrum, spiritual or political. Her tale of the events of that terrible day and the days that followed is moving and troubling. She tells us that people, trying to be comforting, often spoke of God's greater plan, and that she found this rather sickening. She is not interested in cheap theodicy. All she knew, and knows for sure, is that she started out the morning of April 20, 1999 the mother of two children and learned with finality late that night that her daughter's body lay in the school library with a bullet through her head. Misty Bernall's American universe of reasonable expectation was shattered.

The account that follows, of young Cassie's life, describes a very mixed-up and angry girl. Cassie Bernall, who seemed at the moment of her death to have finally turned things around, was for a long time a troubled young woman. Just a few years before her murder, she had been decorating letters to her friends with "monkeys with vampire teeth, axes, knives, mushrooms and witches' spells." Her best friend—a real loser, to judge by Misty Bernall's description—proposed to Cassie that they murder her parents and also one of their teachers. The words were breezy and banal. About the teacher, the friend said only: "Want to help me murder her?" About the parents: "Kill your parents! Murder is the answer to all of your problems. Make those scumbags pay for your suffering." She accompanied this outburst with illustrations of knives dripping with "parent guts" and headstones for "Pa and Ma Bernall." This friend also believed herself to be a vampire. "I am a child of the night," she wrote. "Nothing can hurt me for I am a vampire."

One is tempted to laugh at the posturing and the hyperbole. One is also tempted to conclude that the friend was right, that she really was (but not in any vampiric sense) a child of the night. The Bernalls worried only about overreacting. They had learned of their daughter's correspondence with her friend and the hatching of fantasy plots by snooping in her room, when Cassie started getting failing grades in school and they received teachers' reports about her absenteeism and comportment. The Bernalls seemed inchoately aware of the ways in which phantoms can take shape in our minds and draw us into dire and ugly action. Their daughter, they decided, was being lost to a philosophy of violence and death. They confronted her with what they found. And, in line with the dominant political language of our culture, the daughter attacked her parents vehemently when they confronted her with the purloined evidence of her beliefs and inclinations. Her parents were exaggerating, she insisted. She really wasn't going to kill anybody. Besides—here she played the great American trump card—she had rights, and her rights had been violated when her mother read letters that were in a desk drawer. The Bernalls spent many painful hours tormenting themselves with the question: "Did we violate her right to privacy?"

I have no doubt that in America today the hands of thousands of parents are stayed in times of family danger by a child's proclamation of rights. "What gave you the right to do that?" a friend of mine was queried (by a leader in her state's civil-liberties union) about her refusal to allow her eleven-year-old son to play a compact disc extolling the gang-rape of "bitches." Her beleagured reply was: "But I'm his mother." The rather forlorn tone of her response indicated that she was herself not too sure she had the "right" (for we seem incapable of thinking any other way) to fix the terms of what her eleven-year-old will listen to at home. The Bernalls express their own misgivings. Furtively investigating their daughter, they say, was the hardest thing they ever had to do—until they had to close their daughter's casket.

MUCH OF THE book is devoted to the melancholy memoir of a parent-child struggle. Cassie Bernall's parents were not interested in "saving her soul" in any evangelistic sense. But they feared for their daughter's life, as any American parent reasonably might, in the light of the dismal statistics on teen suicide. They wanted her to find a "new lease on life," as her old ways made her more angry and more miserable. They took serious steps: they removed Cassie from the school at which she studied, and moved to a new neighborhood, and forbade contact with her old friends, and put her in a church school, and altered their own work patterns to watch over her. All these steps seem amply justified now.

Misty Bernall notes that no one took the braggadocio of the Columbine killers seriously. Cassie went along with her parents sullenly, and she later admitted that her "violent fantasies" had been more than talk; that she had, in fact, believed herself gripped by a ghastly darkness. She evidently told several friends that she had "given her soul to Satan." Such beliefs exert real power. "Unfashionable as it might be to suggest it, I felt that we were engaged in a spiritual battle," writes Misty Bernall. Her daughter mutilated herself; she contemplated suicide.

Then something happened. A shift, a transformation, occurred. At a weekend outing with her youth group, Cassie Bernall poured out her heart, asked for forgiveness, and moved to break off the bonds that held her fast. Her turn-around was not a moment of sudden, blinding

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revelation so much as the culminating point of a long process of self-clarification that had been, on Misty Bernall's account, harrowing for all concerned. At first, indeed, the mother was skeptical. Was it a ploy, another instance of playing at something? Slowly her parents became convinced that their child had changed. This happened two years before her murder, and she never veered off the new path. Her parents agreed to her request to return to a public school, as she found the Christian school "stuffy." Friends at Columbine say that she never tried to evangelize, and didn't display her "religious side." *Macbeth* troubled her, she told her friends, because "it was too dark and sinister and death-oriented."

MISTY BERNALL SAYS it would be "all too easy" to make Cassie into a saint, "especially now that she isn't there to make any more mistakes.... But it is important to add that the daughter I knew was equally capable of being selfish and stubborn, and that sometimes she behaved like a spoiled two year old." And martyrdom? If that is what it was, it was an "unlikely martyrdom." Why? Because, Misty Bernall concludes, "before she was a martyr, she was just a teen." Misty Bernall's restraint is admirable. It is certainly preferable to the vulgar beatification that one found in other quarters. For there was nothing miraculous about Cassie Bernall's development; it was the consequence of a long accumulation of affirmations by which she distanced herself from her absorption with death and violence.

This tale, again, is primarily a tale of struggle. The only general lesson that Missy Bernall draws is that the young are crying out for genuine relationships and exigent meaning, and we offer them instead "conflict resolution experts" and psychobabble. There are no fishes and loaves anywhere. Or there are almost none. The terrible day at Columbine also gave proof of the courage and the compassion that young people can muster when they are confronted with such an evil. Students risked their lives, and some lost their lives trying to save others. Some stayed by the side of a dying teacher, creating makeshift bandages and tourniquets and a stretcher from table legs.

In the terror and the carnage of Columbine High School, it was not at all clear what spared a life or cost a life. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, as the release of video tapes made by the two young killers made painfully evident, were enthralled by a crackpot mélange of debased ideas—part racism, part kitsch Nazism, part satanism, part delusional grandiosity that their anticipated killing spree

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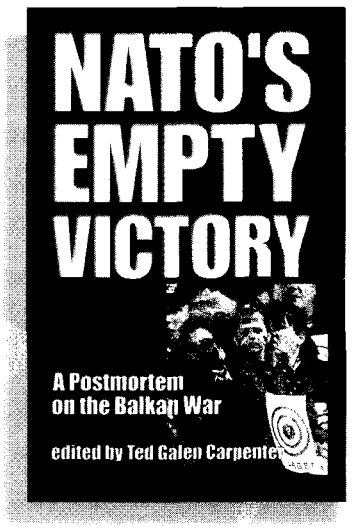

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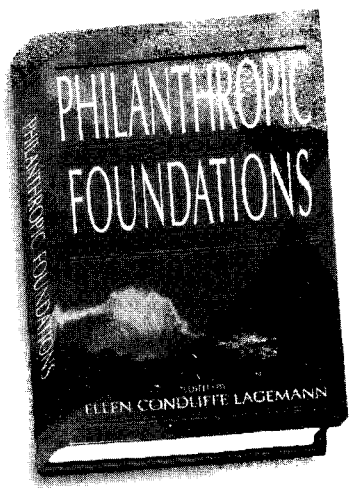

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would "somehow start a revolution." Like Camus's Caligula, they wanted the experience of being capricious dictators with the power of granting life or taking life, and they expressed the same bizarre, adolescent glee at the prospect of mixing absolute freedom with absolute terror. We do well to remember the acts of courage and decency on that terrible day, but we must not avert our eyes from the foulness into which young people in America may be plunged.

Unfortunately, the hearts, the flowers, and the doves with flapping wings on the Cassie websites are too insubstantial to provide a perdurable message of spiritual formation. The inner life is an enterprise of time and work. Changes of heart really do happen, and they are important, but large and sustaining cultural projects must be built on more than fervor and feeling. If Max Weber was right that politics is the slow boring of hard boards, we should not expect any single event or any single act of heroism to carry the day. Political and cultural change is effected when people hang in for the long haul, and institutions—places of work, schools, governments, families—are thereby transformed. Websites and rallies will not do it. Conversion experiences, without the sturdy wisdom of traditions and institution, will not suffice.

The assimilation of the events at Columbine High School into a "culture war" is saddening. What these events require is nuanced interpretation: faith, but also reason. Too often, in the "culture wars," those who dissent from one's own view are construed as enemies. Too often, America is represented as a post-'60s Babylon, a seething fleshpot ready to implode. Yet one cannot engage in cultural criticism and cultural reform from a stance of fear and loathing. Cassie Bernall's mother wrote her book so that she might find some peace, and so that the story of her daughter's difficult life and tragic death would alert us to the forces, good and evil, that are contending for our society. It seems clear that Misty Bernall would agree that the burden of what America still needs to accomplish for the souls of its citizens and its children cannot be carried on the shoulders of a sixteen-year-old girl. ■

Breaking Through the Ice

By TOMAS VENCLOVA

Mikhail Kuzmin: A Life in Art by John E. Malmstad and Nikolay Bogomolov

(Harvard University Press, 512 pp., $49.95)

IN DECEMBER 1915, the young poet Marina Tsvetaeva came from Moscow to St. Petersburg (newly renamed Petrograd, since the traditional name sounded awkwardly German for the capital of a country involved in a war with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires). The poet's primary goal was to give readings of her verse and to earn the admiration of the artistic milieu of the city, which looked down somewhat condescendingly on Moscow. Tsvetaeva was invited to a literary soirée at the house of the well-to-do naval architect Ioakim Kannegiser, where several prominent poets and editors were present. Her reading was a brilliant success; but a poet whom she met there seemed to her even more significant than the instant recognition that she herself had won. Tsvetaeva had been introduced to Mikhail Kuzmin, a poet and a musician, and perhaps the most magnetic personality in the Russian capital at the time.

In 1936, immediately after Kuzmin's death, Tsvetaeva published her essay "An Otherwordly Evening": the title referred to one of Kuzmin's books of poetry, and the essay was intended as a homage by the best poet of Russian emigration to an elder friend and a teacher who stayed in Russia to the very end, however unbearable his circumstances. The essay provides a splendidly concise portrait of Kuzmin:

> A blizzard stood over Petersburg, and in that blizzard, steady as two planets—two eyes standing there. Standing? No, moving. Bewitched, I hadn't noticed that their attendant body had set out, and I only realized it by the wild pain in my eyes, as if the binoculars were being driven whole right into my eyesockets, rim to rim. . . . The eyes were—here. Before me stood—Kuzmin. Eyes—and nothing more. Eyes—and everything else. Everything else was very little: practically nothing at all.

And in an ecstatic poem called *Two Conflagrations (Eyes)*, published in 1923, Tsvetaeva called these eyes "glowing horizons," "polar circles," and "mirrors of the gulf underground." For the young Romantic Tsvetaeva, Kuzmin was virtually a magic creature belonging to another age. He was half Casanova, half Cagliostro—an image that he assiduously shaped himself. Most other memoirists also dwell at length on his enormous eyes, which are frequently described as "non-Russian," and on his foppish, slightly demoniacal looks.

Actually, not everybody was as charmed by Kuzmin as Tsvetaeva was. He was perhaps the most mythicized Russian writer of the early twentieth century, but he was also the most maligned. While many poets of different schools and tastes, from Blok to Mayakovsky, admired him, Akhmatova—who knew him very well in her youth—mentioned Kuzmin in her great late work, *A Poem without a Hero*, with a mixture of scorn and horror:

> Prince Charming, prince of the
> mockers—
> compared with him the foulest of sinners
> is grace incarnate...

In any case, Mikhail Kuzmin was one of the outstanding literary figures of his era, even if he was a person of ambiguous reputation. He was a veritable incarnation of the great modernist period of Russian culture. As a poet, as those who read Russian know, Kuzmin yields to none.

STILL, HE WAS virtually erased from the memories of readers and historians until very recent times. This is paradoxical, because Kuzmin was lucky to escape the worst excesses of the Stalinist terror. In the former Soviet Union, people inclined to black humor used to define execution as "death from natural causes." But Kuzmin died of a perfectly natural cause, angina pectoris, in March 1936, just before the outset of the great purges. Consequently his name was never expressly banned, and some of his lines even found their way into Soviet text-

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books and anthologies, usually as specimens of decadence. Yet he remained an entirely forgotten author—much more forgotten than, say, Mandelstam, who perished in a prison camp and therefore became a "nonperson."

People who claimed knowledge about Kuzmin limited themselves to several clichés and misconceptions. He was, they said, a second-rate proponent of light verse, a stylizer, at best the author of several rather beautiful but imitative pieces about Alexandria. Kuzmin's poetry was out of step, of course, with Soviet reality, and he never made the slightest attempt to adapt to new literary conventions. But there was also another reason for his absence from collective memory. Kuzmin was a homosexual, and he never concealed it.

THE RESURRECTION OF forbidden and forgotten Russian authors in the 1960s largely passed over Kuzmin, not only because of the continuing Soviet censorship, but also due to homophobic prejudice. As for Slavists in the West, their interest in Kuzmin remained rather marginal, perhaps for the same reason. In any case, he was left far behind "the four greats"—Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak, and Tsvetaeva—who were his contemporaries, even though they did not necessarily surpass him in the quality of their work.

Things started to change in the late 1970s, when a three-volume edition of Kuzmin's verse was published in Germany by Vladimir Markov and John Malmstad. (They provided it with the first extensive academic biography of the poet.) The first book of critical essays on Kuzmin appeared in Vienna in 1989, under Malmstad's editorship. At that time, several Russian scholars who were enthusiastic about the long-suppressed writer had already established links with their Western colleagues. Gennady Shmakov, a great expert on Kuzmin and his era, was virtually forced by the Soviets to emigrate, and died in New York in 1988.

Shmakov helped Malmstad enormously, and urged him to continue his research on the Russian poet. These scholars and others dug hard into Russian public and private archives, unearthing priceless material pertaining to Kuzmin and his times. The difficulties that they encountered defy the academic imagination. Kuzmin's voluminous diaries belonged to the lowest and least accessible ring of the Soviet archival inferno, since they were deemed to be "pornographic." Even today, only portions of them have been published. In fact, they are rather tame, and they are full of artistically brilliant passages.

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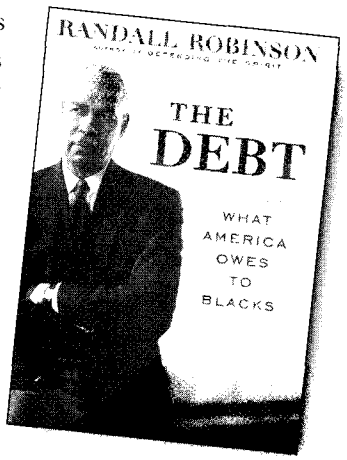

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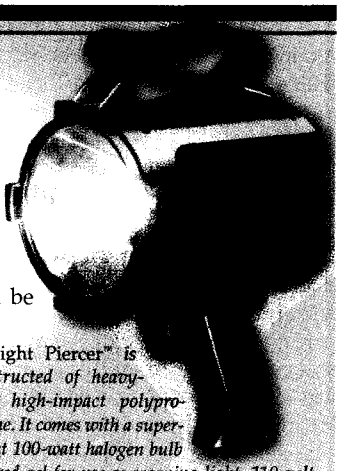

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In the new and more auspicious climate of post-Communist Russia, a scholarly edition of Kuzmin's verse, as well as many popular editions, have finally appeared. A biography by John Malmstad and Nikolay Bogomolov was published in Moscow in 1996. The present English volume by the same authors is a very different book. It consists of twelve chapters (the Russian biography contains only six), and it introduces a great deal of new material. It also discusses Kuzmin's gay identity in more detail. (Some of the Russian academic community and the general public are still a bit squeamish concerning matters that are "too personal.") It omits the discussions of Kuzmin's poems that are of interest primarily to professional Slavists. In sum, the Russian version and the English version complement each other. The work of Malmstad and Bogomolov is a monumental enterprise, a thorough and highly informative study that opens an entirely new perspective on the so-called Silver Age of Russian literature.

SOME SCHOLARS CONSIDER the sobriquet "Silver Age" (as opposed to the "Golden Age" of Pushkin) a misnomer, and propose calling it the "Platinum Age" instead. It is true that Russian art of the early twentieth century was anything but inferior to the art of Pushkin's times; and yet the name Silver Age seems appropriate. Silver denotes moonlight, that is, reflection. And the poets and the artists of the Silver Age were profoundly interested in the cultures of bygone eras—not only Russian, but also Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Western, Oriental—constantly reproducing and transforming their themes and images, and attempting to convey their spirit in works that seemed mirror-like but were intensely original at the same time.

Kuzmin was perhaps the most remarkable representative of this attitude (which was also typical of the early Mandelstam). He immersed himself in past cultures and shaped his personality according to their imaginary patterns; and he did this to an extent that made him unique. Erikh Gollerbakh, a young art critic of the period, wrote about Kuzmin, half-seriously, half-jokingly, that "I do not believe... that he was brought up in Saratov and Petersburg. ... He was born in Egypt, between the Mediterranean and Lake Mareotis, in the homeland of Euclid, Origen and Philo, in sunny Alexandria in the times of the Ptolemies."

An unusual mixture of cultures was already apparent in Kuzmin's family background. His father was a Russian naval officer, and his mother was a descendant of the famous French actor Jean Aufresne, who was invited to Russia by Catherine the Great. (Later Kuzmin discovered that on his mother's side he was a distant relative of Théophile Gautier, the French poet whom he approached in artistic taste.) Some scholars maintain that the family belonged to the Old Believers, a branch of the Russian Orthodox church that did not accept the liturgical reforms of the seventeenth century and retained much of the medieval spirit. An affinity with Church culture remained pronounced throughout Kuzmin's life.

KUZMIN WAS BORN in 1872. He was a lonely child, who was introduced to the European literary and musical canon at a tender age: in his diaries and public pronouncements, he never ceased to express his love of Mozart, Rossini, and Schubert, as well as Molière and Marivaux. His sense of being an outsider was reinforced by his sexual orientation, which became obvious early. (He was introduced to homosexual practices by his older brother, who used to play "tigers" with him, a game in which they each had to spring on and torment the other, as if from an ambush.) In the Russia of those days, homosexuality was considered an offense, though it was usually passed over in silence. (It is hard to imagine Oscar Wilde's trial in Moscow or St. Petersburg.) In any case, a clandestine but lively gay subculture existed in the big cities, and some famous names—Tchaikovsky comes to mind first of all—belonged to it, though they never came out of the closet.

Kuzmin enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, but later dropped out. Still, he won recognition as a composer; for many years he wrote songs (which he successfully performed himself) and worked on operas and operettas. In 1895 he visited Greece, Turkey, and Egypt with one of his lovers, a certain Prince George, about whom virtually nothing is known except that he died in Vienna from heart disease. Alexandria made the greatest impact on Kuzmin. He professed no interest in colonial Arab Egypt, but he became fascinated with Hellenism, early Christianity, and Gnostic heresies for the rest of his life.

It is delicious to imagine Kuzmin meeting with Constantine Cavafy, the Alexandrian poet who paralleled him in more than one respect. Such a meeting would not have been impossible. Cavafy, thirty-two at the time (Kuzmin was twenty-three), already wrote poetry and essays and was a visible figure in the city, at least in the vicinity of Tewfik Street where he lived. But alas, Malmstad and Bogomolov note that the encounter never took place. The poets apparently had never heard of each other. (Kuzmin survived Cavafy by only three years.)

Kuzmin's next and last trip abroad was to Italy, and this journey reinforced his interest in Christianity, especially in the teachings of Francis of Assisi and of various mystical sects, which evoked in him associations with the Old Believers. He also became an expert on Quattrocento painting. Italy, like Alexandria, was "the promised land" for Kuzmin, and recollections of it supported him psychologically throughout the difficult Soviet years. He might have converted to Catholicism for a time, and he even thought about becoming a priest, but upon returning to Russia he switched back to the Old Belief and apparently visited some of the semi-underground sectarian sanctuaries along the Volga and in the North.

It may have been then that he destroyed many of his early literary works, which he considered sinful or "too secular." Yet soon afterwards, around 1904, he gained entry to the definitely secular and sinful literary and artistic milieu of St. Petersburg, which accepted him as a somewhat bizarre but captivating figure. He appeared in Symbolist salons in an Old Believer's outfit, shocking the guests as much by his common folk manners as by his ease in discussing Italian and German culture. It was a strategy later followed, with invariable success, by others. One must remember that this was the beginning of the era of Rasputin.

KUZMIN'S LITERARY DEBUT occurred at the ripe age of thirty-two, in an ephemeral, decadent miscellany, *The Green Collection of Verses and Prose.* Malmstad and Bogomolov note that, together with Kuzmin's poems, the collection included a graphomaniacal novel by a certain Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, who many years later became the head of the Soviet secret police. Incidentally, such a coexistence between literary modernists and future (or actual) Bolsheviks, some of whom subscribed to decadent tastes, was far from unusual. A close friend (and perhaps a lover) of Kuzmin's was Georgy Chicherin, a descendant of a wealthy gentry family that used to send him to German clinics to cure him of his unorthodox sexual tastes. For years, he was Kuzmin's spiritual mentor and financial sponsor. (Their fascinating correspondence is amply quoted in Malmstad's and Bogomolov's book.) Chicherin was to become the second People's Commisar of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Russia (after Trotsky), and he had the same good luck as Kuzmin to die in 1936, before the Great Terror. The old acquaintance with Chicherin and Menzhinsky may have helped Kuzmin to survive during the Soviet years.

In 1906, Kuzmin scored a major literary success: his *Alexandrian Songs*, written in free verse (rare in Russia at that time) was

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praised by critics and warmly accepted by the public. In the same year there occurred also a memorable *succès de scandale*. Taking advantage of the suspension of censorship after the revolution of 1905, Kuzmin published *Wings*, a sort of gay Bildungsroman, parallel in time, and frequently compared to, André Gide's *The Immoralist*. (It is also reminiscent of *The Counterfeiters*, which it precedes by two decades.) The book was wildly attacked (though some critics, including Blok, found it wonderful). From that time on, the titles of "debauchee," "pornographer" and "blasphemous poet of sexual perversion" were conferred on the writer. *Wings* became a sort of closet best-seller, though it did not bring Kuzmin any financial security. In Soviet times, it was rarely if ever mentioned, and it was virtually unobtainable. Today it strikes one as an excessively discreet and rather boring *roman à thèse* which presents its topic in a roundabout way, though the nature of the affairs that it describes is obvious. The loose plot develops in a milieu of bohemian artists, bathhouse attendants, and Old Believers; it tells of a youth who attains liberation through a love that is as much spiritual as physical.

IT SEEMS THAT Kuzmin's gay identity never caused him much inner tension, except perhaps in his early youth (when he made a half-hearted attempt at suicide). It comported easily with his artistic searchings and his essentially religious worldview. Kuzmin's immediate milieu shared with him the attitude that Malmstad and Bogomolov describe as "the predilection for experience itself over all else as the source of art." This was a dandyish and cosmopolitan group concentrated around the journal *The World of Art*, which strove for a revival of Russian culture and Russian taste in the general direction of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Several years after Kuzmin's literary initiation, it spawned the famous Ballets Russes. Many members of the group, including Sergei Diaghilev, the music critic Walter Nouvel, and the painter Konstantin Somov, were homosexual, without any feelings of guilt or remorse.

The general atmosphere of freedom, candor, and sexual tolerance that prevailed in the Russian modernist environment stimulated Kuzmin's creative spirit as nothing had done before. Notwithstanding the critical assaults that made him into a bogeyman in the eyes of the common public, Kuzmin became a very popular figure in artistic circles. He came to know Stravinsky, and Vsevolod Meyerhold and Nikolay Evreinov, the promoters of a "new theater," and the poet and polymath Viacheslav Ivanov, a truly Renaissance figure whose apartment in St. Petersburg, nicknamed "the Tower," was the preferred meeting place of the intellectual elite. At the end of 1906, Kuzmin wrote the music for Blok's play *The Puppet Booth*, a grotesque parodic drama that proved to be a landmark in the history of the Russian avant-garde. Later he became a key figure in a famous St. Petersburg artistic cabaret called "The Stray Dog," where he was admired by budding Acmeist and Futurist poets. No wonder Tsvetaeva recognized him as a charismatic teacher.

Kuzmin's organic mixture of Westernizing and Slavophile strivings was very much in keeping with the course of Russian art of the period. He produced several collections of verse, which he himself considered to be of uneven quality, but all of which were liked by readers. A prolific writer, he also published several rather weak romans à clef (offending some of his friends), and many splendid stories, which dealt mainly with the Hellenistic period and the eighteenth century. His lighthearted plays and his Shakespearean travesties were much frowned upon by the theater censorship, which only added to their fame. And his ephemeral ditties were sung by many in St. Petersburg, as well as in Moscow.

HE LED THE same kind of almost penniless but entertaining life as before, punctuated by two significant love affairs. The first was with Vsevolod Knyazev, a "cornet of the dragoons with his verse and a meaningless death in his breast," as Akhmatova had put it. It was a messy relationship, full of jealousy and hysteria, and it lasted more than two years. Kuzmin and Knyazev spent some time in the old Latvian town of Mitau, in the same hotel where Casanova had once stayed; and soon afterward Knyazev shot himself in Riga. (Akhmatova considered Kuzmin at least partly responsible for his death, hence the angry lines in *Poem without a Hero*.)

Almost immediately thereafter, Kuzmin met Yury Yurkun, who was to become his companion for life. Yurkun merits a separate entry in the history of the Russian avant-garde. He has been characterized by some memoirists as "the Rimbaud of St. Petersburg" (the role of Verlaine being assigned to Kuzmin); but he was by no means a poetic genius. Of Lithuanian origin (Malmstad and Bogomolov give his real name as Iosif Yurkunas, though the right Lithuanian spelling is Juozas Jurkunas), he led a dubious existence in Kiev, making his living as an actor or a clerk, but most likely depending for sustenance on homosexual friendships. Kuzmin took

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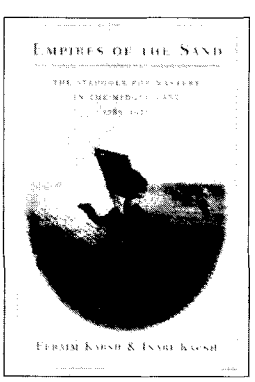

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care of the very young boy, who had to be supported and educated; he also did his best to promote him as a writer.

Yurkun had some literary and artistic gifts (it may be pertinent to note that his relative Ignas Jurkunas became a significant Lithuanian writer), but his first novel, *Swedish Gloves*—another gay Bildungsroman—was his only effort of any value. Still, Kuzmin never missed an opportunity to praise Yurkun, to list him among the best Russian writers, and to present him as a central figure of the "Emotionalist" literary group which he tried to create after the revolution. Their relationship had its ups and downs. Yurkun, like Knyazev, was bisexual, and in 1920 he brought to Kuzmin's flat a famous beauty named Olga Arbenina, who stayed there in a ménage à trois that was frequently irksome for the old poet. Still, it seems that Yurkun's company contributed much to the relative happiness of Kuzmin's late years.

RELATIVE HAPPINESS, INDEED. Kuzmin was an essentially nonpolitical man (even if he displayed some ephemeral right-wing leanings from time to time). He almost failed to notice the revolution of 1905, which he dismissed as "terribly vulgar prattling." It was more difficult, however, to pay no heed to the events of 1917. Kuzmin welcomed the abolition of the monarchy, but he was disappointed by the October coup, to put it mildly. This disappointment did not happen straightaway. One can find in Kuzmin's diary blessings for the Bolsheviks, and initially he was taken for a Bolshevik by some of his acquaintances. (The grace and the dignity displayed by young revolutionary plebeians touched an aesthetic chord within him.)

Yet Kuzmin was very soon horrified by Lenin's, Trotsky's, and Dzerzhinsky's atrocities, and he was shocked by Bolshevik censorship and by the rapidly declining standard of living. His prerevolutionary milieu was dispersed: most, if not all, of its members emigrated. In 1918 a terror was unleashed after the assassination of the head of the Petrograd Cheka, Moisey Uritsky. (The assassin was Leonid Kannegiser, the young son of the same Ioakim Kannegiser in whose flat Tsvetaeva had met Kuzmin less than three years before.) In the spate of arrests and summary executions that followed, Yurkun landed in prison. His life was gravely endangered, but Maxim Gorky (another old acquaintance) helped to secure his release. Gorky also provided Kuzmin, as well as many other writers not entirely loyal to the new system, with some translation work, which guaranteed a meager income.

The rest of Kuzmin's life was a story of old age and physical decline. "I am turning into a ruin, and not even a particularly imposing one," he wrote in his diary in 1925. He gave public readings, some of them for a gay audience, and he worked for the theater, but his living conditions were abysmal. And yet he managed to publish several books of dense Gnostic verse, as well as his only collection of strictly erotic poems, *Pictures under Wraps*, never officially released for sale. (On the title page, its place of publication was indicated as "Amsterdam," although it was St. Petersburg.)

He tried to continue his involvement in literary discussions, but without much success. More and more frequently, the Soviet press attacked him as an obsolete or irrelevant writer; some reviewers did not hesitate to proclaim him "a case for the Cheka." Worst of all, the disdainful attitudes also prevailed in the émigré press, where many of his old friends, who had fled to Berlin or Paris, found their niche. (Tsvetaeva's admiration was an exception.) Kuzmin, in turn, was not too enthusiastic about the émigrés. He also despised the Soviet regime and the Soviet way of life, which he called "unreal and counterfeit." In his diary, he wrote that Lenin "died like a dog" (the dictator's demise inspired Kuzmin's play *The Death of Nero*, "arguably his dramatic masterpiece," in the words of Malmstad and Bogomolov).

Notwithstanding his circumstances, Kuzmin still managed to indulge in his share of pleasure—art, conversation, sensual experience, love. Kuzmin's and Yurkun's shabby flat became a sort of exclusive salon frequented by young (and not necessarily gay) artists, philologists, and translators, including two highly talented poets, Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedensky, whose radical experiments in absurdist and surrealist writing were influenced to a considerable degree by Kuzmin's verse. Together with Yurkun, Kuzmin became an avid moviegoer. He was fascinated by American Negro music (and was accused of being an apologist for "degenerate art"), by Freud, by Joyce. All these interests were visible in his last, and perhaps his best, book of poetry, *The Trout Breaking through the Ice*, which appeared in 1929—the year of the first Five-Year Plan and collectivization. The volume remained unnoticed outside a narrow circle of friends and fellow poets. (In the 1960s, young intellectuals and literati in the Soviet Union, myself among them, passed the book from hand to hand, and some memorized it in its entirety.)

As someone said, one might form the best idea of Kuzmin's twilight years by imagining Oscar Wilde in the role of a Soviet subject. Perhaps Cavafy would have made an even closer analogy. The early Soviet criminal code did not list homosexuality as a punishable offense; it was considered a form of curable mental illness (an attitude towards the gay subculture that was widespread also in czarist times). Kuzmin's last works treated gay themes in a rather open manner, which provoked Akhmatova's disgust. The situation changed fundamentally in 1934, when Stalin pronounced male homosexuality to be a crime, and Gorky identified it with fascism. (It was in the same year, ironically, that Hitler arranged the blood purge of Roehm and his lieutenants, accusing them of "depraved morals"). The stifling—and thickening—atmosphere of these years most likely expedited Kuzmin's death.

Yurkun survived him by just two years. Together with many of Kuzmin's acquaintances and friends, he was arrested and shot in 1938, after a trial that lasted only fifteen minutes. (He was accused not of being gay, which would have entailed a prison sentence, but of belonging to an anti-Soviet conspiracy, which entailed execution.) Olga Arbenina, his common-law wife, was not aware of his true fate for many years. In 1946, believing that he was still alive in one of Stalin's camps, she wrote him a letter, one of the most poignant documents of that—or any—era. Malmstad and Bogomolov quote it on the last page of their book: "Be happy. Try to achieve fame. Remember me. Don't scold me. I did everything that I could."

NOT MUCH OF Kuzmin's work has been translated into English (or into other languages), and translating him is not an easy task, even if he lacks Tsvetaeva's penchant for linguistic games and Pasternak's speedy, gasping intonation. He is frequently considered a proto-Acmeist, that is, a poet close to the school that emphasized objectivity and restraint, to which the young Mandelstam and Akhmatova belonged. Kuzmin indeed influenced the Acmeists, but he was never one of them. For him, Acmeism, as it appeared around 1910, paid too much attention to theory and dogma. But Kuzmin was a truly Mozartian artist, playful and whimsical though highly refined, always opting for pluralism, openness, and heterogeneity.

He worked within the classical tradition, but many of his poems were enigmatic and hermetic. (Gennady Shmakov compared him to Wallace Stevens and the mature W. B. Yeats.) From his apparently simple *Alexandrian Songs*, from his early verse, which praised the "spirit of trifles" virtually in the vein of Proust, to

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You deserve a factual look at...

The Arabs of Israel

Are they a "persecuted minority?"

The world is much focused on the developments in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip, in which, for the most part, Israel has relinquished sovereignty and authority to the Palestinian Authority (P.A.). Ninety-eight percent of the Arabs in these territories live now under the rule of the P.A. There is some question whether or not they are better off than before. But there are many who believe that the Arabs in Israel itself are a "persecuted minority."

What are the facts?

Israel is a Democratic Country. Israel is an open, pluralistic, and egalitarian society. Different religions, cultures, and social traditions co-exist. Protection of such diversity is embedded in Israel's traditions and confirmed by the government. About 20% of the population (over one million people) are non-Jews, most of them Arabs, and some Druze. Like all other Israeli citizens, they have full rights to vote and to hold elective office. Both Arabs and Druze hold seats in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Every Knesset, since the founding of the State in 1948, has had Arab and Druze members. All transactions in the Knesset are simultaneously translated into Arabic, and Arab members may address the Knesset in Arabic.

It is official policy of the Israeli government to foster the language, culture, and traditions of the Arab minority, in the educational system and in daily life. Arabic is an official language in Israel, together with Hebrew. Israel's Arabic press is the most vibrant and independent of any country in the region. There are more than 20 Arabic periodicals. They publish what they please, subject only to the same military censorship as Jewish publications. There are daily TV and radio programs in Arabic. Arabic is taught in Jewish secondary schools. Israeli universities are renowned centers of learning in the history and literature of the Arab Middle East.

Education and literacy of the Arab population in Israel is as high as and probably higher than in any Arab country. The literacy rate among Israeli Arabs is 95%, virtually the same as for Israeli Jews. There are close to 1,000 Arab educational institutions in Israel, with about 300,000 students—just about 25 times as many as in 1948, when the State of Israel was created, Ninety percent of Arab children attend school, probably the highest ratio of any Arab population anywhere. Israeli universities and technical institutions are freely available to the Arabs. About 5,000 Arab students attend such schools.

Israeli Arabs Enjoy Full Equality in Law and in Fact. All religious communities in Israel enjoy the full protection of the State. Israeli Arabs—Moslems, as well as many Christian denominations—are free to exercise their faiths, to observe their own weekly day of rest and holidays, and to administer their own internal affairs. Each community has its own religious councils and courts, and has full jurisdiction over religious affairs, including matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce. The holy sites of all religions are administered by their own authorities and protected by the government.

> "Contrary to propaganda...the Arabs in Israel enjoy every civil right and have the same status under law as Jewish Israelis"

In contrast to the non-Israeli Arab world, Arab women in Israel enjoy the same status as men. Israeli law grants women equal rights, including the right to vote and to be elected to public office, prohibits polygamy, child marriage, and the barbarity of female sexual mutilation. It has thus vastly changed the status of women, to far above that of any country in the region. Israeli health standards are by far the highest in the Middle East. Israeli health institutions are freely open to all Arabs, on the same basis as they are to Jews.

There is, however, one difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews in Israel. Israeli and Druze men are required to do three years of military service and then serve one month every year until they are 50. Arabs are exempted from military duty and are not required to perform any compensating civilian service. Since the surrounding Arab states, with the exceptions of Egypt and recently of Jordan, are the avowed enemies of Israel and are dedicated to its destruction, this exemption is granted by the Israeli government to its Arab citizens, so as to spare them conflicts of loyalty and conscience.

Contrary to propaganda and to what many believe, the Arabs in Israel are full-fledged citizens, enjoy every civil right, and have the same status in law as Jewish Israelis. In summary, they enjoy the highest standards of living and liberty of any Arabs in the Middle East. It is instructive and sobering to compare the condition of the approximately one million Arabs in Israel with that of the pitiful remnants of Jewry in Arab countries. Jews have been living in Arab countries for almost 2,000 years. Under Arab dominance, they were always third-class citizens and subject to harassment and persecution. There were about 900,000 Jews in Arab countries in 1946—now there are fewer than 25,000. But there are now over one million Arabs in Israel, as against 150,000 in 1948—an almost seven-fold increase. These figures alone would seem to prove that things can't be all that bad for Arabs in Israel.

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The Trout Breaking through the Ice, an incredibly complicated dreamlike book on love, parting, and spiritual rebirth, Kuzmin remained true to himself. He was a poet of culture and artifice, with a strictly aesthetic worldview, whose work was permeated with a multitude of subtexts and allusions and more often than not foreshadowed the postmodernist spirit of our own times.

This, and his permanent striving for artistic independence, makes him particularly consonant with the literary paradigms prevalent in today's Russia. And yet categories such as modernism and postmodernism seemed mostly irrelevant to him. "I do not create theories, I just wonder, love and meditate," he wrote in 1914. "[B]esides, in my seclusion, I got used to considering the phenomena from the point of view of eternity and truth, and not of the passing present." This credo was written under the pseudonym of Peter the Hermit.

The bizarre and tragic life story of Kuzmin would merit only historical interest if he were not one of those rare individuals who achieved a perfect balance between his life and his art. For all of its richness, its meticulousness, and its elegance, the biography by Malmstad and Bogomolov does not achieve such a balance, and hardly strives for it. The book deals more with the life than with the art, presenting Kuzmin's love affairs and the amusing Nabokovian incidents of his times in exhaustive detail, but rarely venturing into the realm of strictly literary research. I do not mean this as a rebuke. A serious study of Kuzmin's art is a task for more than one generation of scholars. It will continue as long as Kuzmin himself will be read—and that means, if not eternity, certainly a much longer span of time than the passing present. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

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involved in the European Union and NATO, interacting with millions of tourists from Western Europe every year, fully integrated with the age of globalization, the supermarket, and the stock market, and enjoying a vibrant democracy and free press is "not part of the West."

The opposition of Greek public opinion to the war in Kosovo resulted mostly from fears of a major upheaval at the country's doorstep. It had nothing to do with hatred of Albanians, half a million of whom work in Greece, but rather with frustration with the double standards sometimes applied by the international community when confronting ethnic cleansing around the world. Is it fair to equate anti-war sentiments with anti-Western attitudes?

ACHILLES PAPARSENOS
Press Counselor
Embassy of Greece
Washington, D.C.

TAKIS MICHAS REPLIES:

The present government of Kostandinos Simitis is undoubtedly sincere in its efforts to turn Greece into a Western nation. Yet it is my view that the government, regrettably, is failing. Let us look at the facts.

Two years ago, none other than Greek President Kostis Stephanopoulos, during a visit to the Holy Mount of Athos, spoke of the "vicious threat from the West," a place populated by "Protestants and popists." Neither the government nor any other political party voiced any criticism of these outrageous statements. And, as recently as January 3, the archbishop of Greece stated that President Clinton "had blood on his hands."

A couple of years ago, the Greek-Serbian association collected three million signatures in support of indicted war criminal Radovan Karadjic. There is not a single official communiqué in which Slobodan Milosevic is referred to as an "indicted war criminal." Not even one of the Greek volunteers who by their own proud admission participated in the Srebrenica massacre has been arrested by the Greek authorities. Not a single act of protest has taken place in Greece for the victims of Serb aggression in Bosnia or Kosovo. However, innumerable demonstrations and open concerts have taken place supporting the Serb and Bosnian Serb atrocities.

Need I go on?

New Israel?

TO THE EDITORS:

In her discussion of Israel's "new historians" ("The Past Is Not a Foreign Country," November 29), Anita Shapira decries a methodology whereby "one side completely disrobes, disclosing all its weaknesses and flaws, while the other remains conveniently shrouded in the mystery of the veil."

But, as Shapira knows quite well, there is nothing symmetrical about the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. In an environment where the disequilibrium of power is so vast, the will of a nation to reexamine its past is an inherently easier undertaking for the Israelis. In any case, it's what happens as a matter of course in a democracy. The election last May of Prime Minister Ehud Barak—who campaigned on a pledge to address the many social, educational, economic, and other internal challenges facing Israel—has led to the jettisoning of many old taboos as Israelis move self-confidently into the twenty-first century.

Emergence of the "new historians" coincides with access to newly declassified documents covering the period of Israel's War of Independence. Israelis were initially disconcerted to read that in some instances Arab villagers did not flee of their own volition but were pushed out. As more and more evidence has emerged, the view that the motivations for Arab evacuation were mixed is the standard, commonly accepted truth, as Shapira acknowledges.

Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin writes in his memoirs that in 1948, after a consultation with David Ben-Gurion, troops under his leadership moved into Lod and Ramle and forcibly evicted the Arab population. In a fascinating illustration that sheds light on the current discussion, the military censor excised those details from the Rabin memoir, and the first edition was published without it. With the further passage of time, the censors have relented, and the second edition carries Rabin's firsthand account. Similarly, Netanel Lorch—the highly respected official historian of Israel's War of Independence who founded the Israeli army's history branch and later served as secretary of the Knesset and as a diplomat on several continents—wrote, in an effort to set the record straight before he died, that he altered accounts of historical events to fit political needs.

Israelis today are clearly prepared to let facts speak for themselves. Just as Jews were around in 1948, so too were Palestinians. In some cases, Israeli forces conducted themselves less than honorably. Facing up to the reality that certain actions should not have taken place hardly threatens the legitimacy of the Israeli state. The admission, 50 years later, of shortcomings can be not only cathartic but also ennobling. Israel's fight to achieve statehood was no less honorable simply because it is willing to recognize that wars are fought imperfectly and that many ordinary people on both sides suffered. Arab armies declared their intent to extinguish the Jews in 1948 Palestine. That is no myth; it is fact. Some Israeli units ran Arab villagers off their land, this is also fact.

At issue is the question of whether myths ought to be perpetuated merely

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because they are ingrained. Israelis understand that, while some widely accepted myths served a useful purpose in forging a united state, their society is better served today by assessing history frontally, honestly. Questioning myths and dogma is exactly what mature societies in democratic countries do.

NORMAN ROSENBERG
Executive Director
New Israel Fund
Washington, D.C.

ANITA SHAPIRA REPLIES:
I did not demand symmetry between Israeli and Palestinian disclosure. I pointed out the lack of symmetry in the archival policy of Israel and the Arab states—Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. Moreover, my critique was not directed against this or that governmental policy—it is true that democracies tend toward greater transparency, and this is only to their credit. However, I would expect historians to take this lack of symmetry into account when writing about the interrelations between these countries. In the case of the books I reviewed, I had reservations about the use in some instances of this unsymmetrical documentation.

Norman Rosenberg states that "questioning myths and dogma is exactly what mature societies in democratic countries do." I could not agree more, and I hope I have made a modest contribution in this direction: "new historians" are not immune to mistakes, and slanted representations or sloppy scholarship should be weeded out lest they become the sources of new myths and dogmas. This has nothing to do with Israel's accepting the darker chapters of its past, as a mature and strong country should.

Happy poets

TO THE EDITORS:
I'm in general agreement with Brian Phillips's review of Bill Moyers's *Fooling With Words* ("Shiny Happy People," December 13). Every poet I've spoken to who saw the show was appalled by it. But Phillips's general assessment of contemporary American poetry was wrong on several points.

First of all, poetry sales are up in recent years. When I became editor of the University of Pittsburgh Press's Pitt Poetry Series 20 years ago, our annual sales were in the $30,000 range, and we were lucky to sell 1,000 copies of any title. In our last completed fiscal year, sales were just shy of $400,000. For the past three years we have made money. It's not much money by the standards of the book brothels that are the major trade houses, but it's not poverty, either. And nearly all other poetry editors with whom I've spoken in the last couple of years also say that sales are up.

Second, Phillips makes a howler when he talks about "poetry-friendly independent bookstores." Though I'm sorry to see the demise of independent bookstores, the vast majority of them are about as "poetry-friendly" as a Mississippi Republican. Praise the ones that are, but there are maybe 50 independent bookstores in the whole country that carry a reasonably comprehensive selection of contemporary poetry. Most indies, even if they care, believe they can't afford to stock poetry in depth.

Third, Phillips seems to believe that all good poetry is characterized by a "well-earned reputation for difficulty." People have read and listened to Homer for most of 3,000 years without having advanced degrees. It's a lot easier (and more rewarding), I think, to read some of the best poems of Wordsworth, Browning, Whitman, and Frost than to read the average editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*. And many of the best contemporary American poets—off the top of my head I'd mention Philip Levine, Li-Young Lee, Gerald Stern, Alicia Ostriker—are similarly approachable. Of course, there's a depth to these writers that rewards rereading and thoughtful attention—they're good poets!—but that doesn't mean that entry into their poems is "difficult."

Finally, Phillips repeats the canard about "the continuing professional withdrawal of poets into colleges and universities." Sure, just like Chaucer sold out to Richard II. Poets, for reasons that Phillips suggests, have always sought patrons, and American colleges and universities are pretty good ones, since they are one of the great democratizing engines left in American life. Why don't we talk about "the continuing professional withdrawal of physicists into colleges and universities"? I'd suggest it's because Phillips, together with many other people, really has bought into the myth of the starving artist (almost as good as the dead one).

ED OCHESTER
Editor
Pitt Poetry Series
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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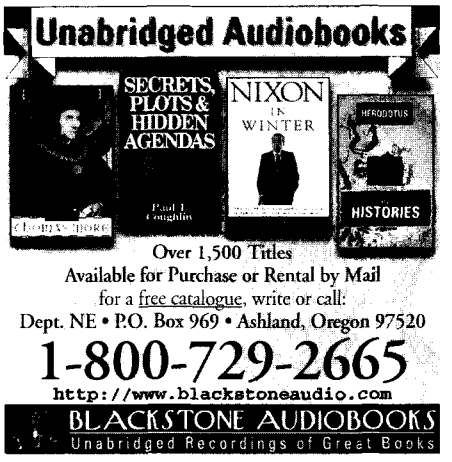

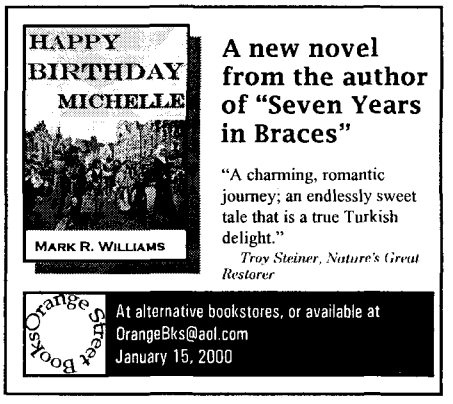
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Mywife.com

IF YOU'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF running your own business, knock on our door. I'm serious. Ever since my wife left her job running a digital-TV firm last year, an unusually high percentage of folks who've shown up on the stoop have become either Jody's business partners or consulting clients. This is a new twist, I think, on the contemporary cliché: you know, high-powered career mom gets beamed from the executive suite to the nursery, where she plots Zach's naps on a spreadsheet and checks out preschools as if they were corporate-takeover targets. Jody's mania is different. Maybe because she plans to go back to a serious job soon, her displaced energy during this hiatus with our young daughter has taken the form of virtually nonstop business deals. She's been a (thankfully) un-neurotic mom, but a demon of a stay-at-home CEO.

FIRST IT WAS THE ZONE MAN. THE Zone, for those too svelte to know, is a foolproof (for us at least) diet that preaches a balance of proteins, "good" carbs, and fats. When Jody went on it, she found a place called Zone Delivery to drop off Zone-perfect meals for a few weeks. That was scary enough. Then I emerged from my lair one day to find Zone Man himself in our living room, working with Jody on his expansion plan. Next thing I knew, it was the woman who teaches the "Mommy and Me" class, doing the numbers with Jody on a scheme to start her own birthday-party business. Then it was a former employee's Internet startup. Then another's book project. I knew things had hit critical mass when Amelia, our two-year-old, said her little friend was coming over for a "meeting."

THE WHOLE THING HAS GIVEN ME fresh sympathy for the plight of the corporate mom. And even more sympathy for the plight of the noncorporate work-at-home dad she's married to: me. At the office, my wife had more than 100 employees to boss around. Here there's just me and Amelia. Then there's the psychological adjustment to a spouse who, you come to realize, is dealing with a serious case of schizophrenia. At first this creeps up on you—as in "I hadn't really thought about it, but the shift from running a company to reading the same book twelve times in a row to a toddler *is* a tough transition." Then, just when I thought I understood why Jody was crying into her Cheerios each morning while she read *The Wall Street Journal*, she started crying when headhunters dangled interesting job openings, too. (Note to headhunters: Jody's over this now. Keep the calls coming.) Finally it dawns on you: such struggles *will never go away*. I don't know what the experts say, but my own casual study of two-worker families with kids leaves no question that women feel these pressures more than men. Testosterone seems to be a fair proxy for self-absorption, which dulls men's anxiety. Still, if career-minded women who also love being with their kids find the dilemma more traumatic, they also have a hidden consolation—in the course of trying to deal with it, they drive their husbands mad.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY THE CASE WHEN (as with us) there's a humiliating gap in earning potential. Jody earns about as much from a week of consulting as I do from a year's worth of pieces for THE NEW REPUBLIC. (Note to editor: Does this strike you as just?) It's hard to capture in words how pathetic this discrepancy makes me feel. And it turns out there are nuances to these feelings, a kind of topography of inadequacy. If I'd married an heiress, for example, that would have been one thing—the money (more than enough of it!) would just be there, an immutable fact, an entitlement. Being the TNR writer-husband of such a woman would carry an air of aristocratic panache. After all, you're saving the world through your high-minded articles! When, instead, you marry a woman who simply earns much more than you do, it's not dashing—it's depressing. Your wife, you are constantly reminded, is slaving away to support your lifestyle. Assuming that your God-given brain could produce a much higher income (it surely could, couldn't it?), the choice you've made—to be a public-policy writer—seems self-evidently self-indulgent. After all, who reads this obscure crap anyway? (Note to editor: Just being self-effacing. Actually was just remarking how the magazine sparkles under your bold stewardship.)

AS I'VE TOLD JODY ON NUMEROUS occasions, the best way for her to assuage my guilt is to hit it big in the Internet gold rush and then retire—converting herself into the heiress model overnight. But for now the cyberboom makes matters worse. Take the night we had several entrepreneurs over for dinner. One, a 27-year-old, was an intern (yes, like Monica Lewinsky) in Jody's office at the White House (we're both Clinton administration refugees). Now he's the founder of a hot e-commerce start-up. In the worst-case scenario (i.e., he gets bought out by some big firm before any IPO), he's worth many millions before he's 30. But that's nothing. Another guest was a 31-year-old who was the fourth employee to join (he's since left) a company whose services speed up delivery of Web content (whatever the hell that means). The firm just went public. His shares are worth more than $600 million. The guy was there for eight months. I'm not making this up.

ALL OF WHICH LEADS TO A NAGGING question: What is Jody doing with me? (Note to wife: Of course I don't really worry about such nonsense, but I have two graphs to fill, and editors love this "inside the mind of a family-man stuff.") Deep down, of course, I know there are answers, but in my darker moments it feels as if they come down to "Inertia—she's with me already" and "Journalists can be so amusing to have around." No doubt the chance to have your own in-house Boswell counts for something. Yet none of this gives me what the business schools call "sustainable competitive advantage." My functions could easily be contracted out. When you throw in the fact that writers notoriously need mountains of reassurance anyway, you can imagine how emotionally needy I've been lately, precisely in Jody's own hour of greatest need. Just like a man!

NOT LONG AGO WE VISITED A HOLLYwood writer whose production company, as part of a development deal, shares fancy offices on a studio lot with Will Smith. I'm thinking, he's a "writer," I'm a "writer"—it's pretty much the same job. In my fantasy, it's my office, and fans are whispering within earshot. "Oh, yeah, that's Matt Miller," one says. "Marty Peretz just signed him to a big three-piece deal starring health care, urban schools, and rising inequality." "Great office," says another. "I hear they're taking his voucher piece public in the spring." The oohs and aahs are soothing. Jody beams. When I snap out of this reverie, Jody is across the room on the phone trying to conduct a business call with a hard-to-reach bigwig. Our little angel stands next to her in full tantrum mode, wailing at the top of her lungs for no apparent reason. "It doesn't bother me if it doesn't bother you," Jody says into the phone. "Let's keep going." Ditto, I tell myself.

MATTHEW MILLER

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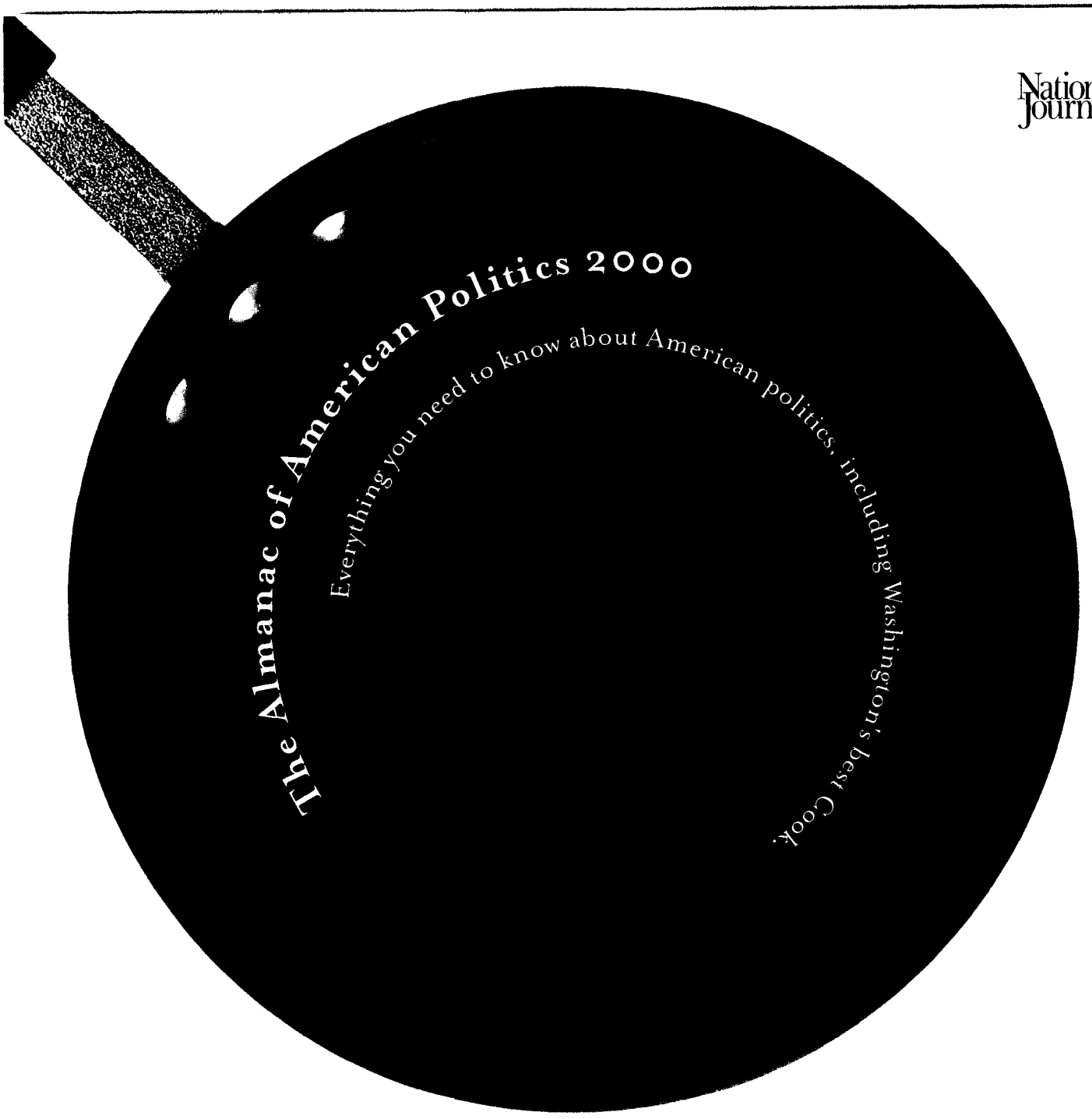
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